

Are you concerned about what your child is reading?

Some Facts and Fiction About Reading, Truth, and Knowing

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This article is far-sweeping, and I hope it will be helpful to readers with children and without. It discusses whether fiction is truer than facts, whether *knowing* someone is different than *knowing about* someone (such as whether knowing Jesus is different from knowing about Him), why we should monitor our children's reading, and why we should all be more careful when reading fiction than nonfiction. Along the way, we'll grind the truth out of Thomas Gradgrind, meet poisonous snake dealer Bill Jones, get thrown into a dungeon, learn some facts about the Wotton Electric Picture House, and gyre and gimble in the wabe—so hang on!

Catchy slogans, colorful posters, and summer reading programs at public libraries all try to get kids to read. So do school teachers and homeschooling moms and dads. But while we are encouraging our children to read, how much thought are we giving to what they read? And, as odd as it may seem to those parents who can hardly convince their child to pick up a book, some parents might also consider whether their children are reading too much, or at least too much of certain kinds of books.

While caring parents screen the movies and Internet sites their children see and the video games they play (and also, hopefully, limit their time spent in these pursuits), I get the impression that very few moms and dads have the same concern about books. I think that we parents can be so happy that our children are reading that we can forget that, just as with more modern media, the wrong books can also harm impressionable young minds.

I want to be careful that I am not misunderstood. I am not saying that we should stop our children from reading or, as some advocate, that we should allow them to read only nonfiction. I am saying that we might want to stop and consider whether we are being wrongly influenced by our culture to let our children read anything—at least anything intended for children—that gets into print.

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Voices from the Past

Many of us might be surprised that parents in past generations often showed the same concern about books that we now reserve for newer methods of communication.

This was printed in 1820:

The great profusion of children's books protracts the imbecility of childhood. They arrest the understanding, instead of advancing it. They give forwardness without strength. They hinder the mind from making vigorous shoots, teach it to stoop when it should soar, and contract when it should expand. They inculcate morality and good actions it is true, but they often inculcate them on a worldly principle, and rather teach the pride of virtue and the profit of virtue, than point out the motive of virtue and the principle of sin. They reprobate bad actions as injurious to others, but not as an offence against the Almighty. Even children should be taught that when a man has committed the greatest possible crime against his fellow creature, still the offence against God is what will strike a true penitent with the deepest remorse. All morality not drawn from this scriptural source is weak, defective, and hollow. Give children the Bible itself.

("On Novel Reading," *The Guardian, or Youth's Religious Instructor*, 1820, 48.)

I hope no Christians will argue against giving our children the Bible. But should it be the Bible alone? Notice that this writer points out that even books that we might consider good, books that teach virtue, can do so from an unbiblical and, therefore, harmful point of view. So, while I am not advocating that we read only the Bible to our children, I am urging caution. In an age when we are virtually inundated with a multiplicity of ethics, poorly written novels, well-written paganism, and propaganda for various ungodly opinions and perversions, perhaps some cautions from the past can help wake us out of our lethargy and be more careful about what and even how much our children read.

U.S. statesman, John W. Foster (1836-1917) had this opinion of novels: "I wish we could collect all together, and make one vast fire of them. I should exult to see the smoke of them ascend, like that of that of Sodom and Gomorrah: the judgment would be as just."

Even writers themselves have given us fair warning. Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774), himself a novelist (he wrote *The Vicar of Wakefield*), gave this counsel: "Above all things never let your son touch a novel or a romance. How delusive, how destructive are those features of consummate bliss! They teach the youthful mind to sigh after beauty and happiness which never existed; to despise the little good which fortune has mixed in our cup by expecting more than she ever gave; and in general, take the word of a man who has seen the world, and has studied human nature more by experience than by precept, take my word for it, I say that such books teach us very little of the world."

Fiction Truer than Facts?

Perhaps Foster and Goldsmith overstate the case. So, I'll balance them out with Douglas Jones, editorial director of Canon Press (they publish Christian homeschool materials). Jones says, "Avoiding fictional stories is one of the most dangerous things Christian parents can do to their children." He argues, "We tend to ape those thinkers in the Enlightenment who viewed truth as something utterly imageless, purely literal, bloodlessly formulaic.... Stories and imagination and figurative language are not simply nifty decorations on truth; they are the heart of truth."

That's odd. I always thought of truth as the body of real things, events, and facts. For example, $2+2=4$ is truth. What is all black is not white is truth. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" is truth. But this is apparently too bloodlessly formulaic for Jones. I suppose that for him the following from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a much better expression of the truth:

'Tis the voice of the Lobster; I heard him declare,
"You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair."
As a duck with its eyelids, so he with his nose
Trims his belt and his buttons, and turns out his toes.

Okay, enough sarcasm. It's just that I have trouble agreeing with Jones that "stories and imagination and figurative language are...the heart of truth."

Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). But Jones has an answer for that, too. He claims that stories, etc., "are the means God Himself has chosen to communicate to us. Christ could have easily described Himself as the 'prime mover' or 'divine being' or 'ground of reality' (all of which are still partly figurative), but instead He revealed Himself

with the 'fictions' of a lamb, lion, door, bread, path, star, image, and word. Why? Because such fictions capture so much more of His reality and truth than arid intellectual descriptions could ever hope for. The figurative can be 'more true' than bare literal sentences. The literal cleaves off too much reality."

Let's take a moment to examine this. First, Jones seems to have confused the words "fiction" and "figurative." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* says that fiction is, "1 a : something invented by the imagination or feigned; specifically : an invented story b : fictitious literature (as novels or short stories) c : a work of fiction; especially : NOVEL 2 a : an assumption of a possibility as a fact irrespective of the question of its truth <a legal fiction> b : a useful illusion or pretense 3 : the action of feigning or of creating with the imagination".

But it says that figurative is, "1 a : representing by a figure or resemblance : EMBLEMATIC b : of or relating to representation of form or figure in art <figurative sculpture> 2 a : expressing one thing in terms normally denoting another with which it may be regarded as analogous : METAPHORICAL <figurative language> b : characterized by figures of speech <a figurative description>".

Notice that fiction is "invented by the imagination or feigned...an invented story," but what is figurative is emblematic, a representation, metaphorical. If we confuse what is figurative with what is fiction, we might say that a national flag is fiction. If we use the terms correctly, we would say that the flag is an emblem of the nation; it represents the nation figuratively.

An even more serious error is Jones's misunderstanding of the Bible's use of words such as lamb, lion, door, bread, etc. to describe Jesus. The Bible calls Jesus the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Jesus' being a Lamb predates the cute little creatures that follow their mothers around in sheep pastures. In fact, God ordered that these creatures be used as sacrifices in the Old Testament because they pictured (were figures of) Jesus, not the other way around. Jesus is the true Lamb. Likewise, Jesus said He was the true bread (John 6:32-35). Jesus is not called bread to figure bread; He is called bread because He is the true bread and bread figures Him! This is true of all of the biblical descriptions of Jesus, including the Word. The Bible's calling Jesus the Word is not a fiction! It is foundational truth. Our ability to put words together into a rational sentence is because we are made in the image of God, and it is a figure of Jesus, who is the Word.

That said, are "stories and imagination and figurative language" *the* way God has chosen to communicate to us? Granted, the Bible contains stories and figurative language. But it also contains enormous amounts of straightforward, rational propositions and commands. Even the vast majority of "stories" in the Bible are not fiction, but historical accounts. Some stories are also found in prophetic dreams, visions, etc., which are written in highly symbolic language. Fiction is found in parables, which account for only a tiny portion of the Scriptures. Old Testament sacrifices, days, dietary restrictions, and so many other points of the law, although they literally happened for the people at that time, are figures because they were shadows of the reality to come with Jesus Christ. Is Jones right when he says, "such fictions capture so much more of His reality and truth than arid intellectual descriptions could ever hope for. The figurative can be 'more true' than bare literal sentences. The literal cleaves off too much reality"?

If Jones' statement is correct, we should prefer to be back in the Old Testament. We should prefer the animal sacrifices to the plain statement "Christ died for our sins." We should desire the wave sheaf offering over "He is risen." We should be dissatisfied with Jesus' words, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20). Instead, we should crave that Jesus had instead sounded more like this: "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD" (Isaiah 66:20). But the Bible says that the Old Testament is merely a shadow and a veil that is done away in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:14; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 9:24; 10:1). The stories of the Old Testament are examples, but that does not make them superior to the plain statements of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). In Mark 4:11-12, we see that Jesus spoke in parables, not to "capture so much more of His reality and truth than arid intellectual descriptions," but so the multitudes would *not* understand. (After all, they had already demonstrated that they did not really understand the meaning behind the types and shadows of the Old Testament, so why should they be any better at understanding Jesus' parables?)

Yes, stories, such as Nathan's parable to David, can sometimes jog a response in us that a plain statement might not. If Nathan had walked up to David and simply told him his sin, David might not have repented. He might even have become angry and added to his sin by taking action to quiet Nathan. No doubt God inspired Nathan to use the parable to touch a soft spot in David's heart that led to his repentance. But this does not mean that the parable contained more truth than a plain statement would have. "Fictions," as Jones calls them, can also be useful in illustrating a point. With the appropriate background knowledge, we can understand the meaning of the prophecies and parables, as well as the historical stories and figures, of the Bible. But without that prior knowledge, without antecedent propositions, we would have trouble understanding them, and they might not convey truth to us. Doug Jones is simply wrong in his assessment that "fictions capture so much more of His reality and truth than arid intellectual descriptions could ever hope for. The figurative can be 'more true' than bare literal sentences. The literal cleaves off too much reality." Without the "arid intellectual descriptions" and "bare literal sentences," we would not know what the "fictions" were supposed to convey.

Grinding the Truth Out of Gradgrind

In the Summer 2007 Memoria Press catalog, called *The Classical Teacher*, appears an article, "Is Fiction False?" by Martin Cothran. This author likens "modern people" to Thomas Gradgrind, "the schoolmaster in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, who, when he is introduced in chapter two of that book, asks his class to define a horse. He first asks Sissy Jupe, whom he calls 'Girl number twenty,' to define a horse. Her father is a horsebreaker, and she has lived around them her whole life; but when Gradgrind asks her to define what a horse is, she is perplexed and speechless." Gradgrind then asks a boy named Bitzer, who pleases Gradgrind with his definition: "Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth."

Cothran then observes, "Of course, Sissy Jupe knew what a horse was better than anyone else in the class, including the knowledgeable Bitzer. She had seen a horse with her eyes, looked upon it, and her hands had handled it. She certainly knew the truth of the horse better than Bitzer, who had simply memorized sterile facts about it." Yes, no

doubt Sissy Jupe knew horses better than Bitzer. But I challenge Cothran to explain *how* Sissy knew horses apart from facts. Cothran, Jones, and others of their ilk disparage “arid intellectual descriptions,” “bare literal sentences,” and “sterile facts.” (They also sneer at “modern people” and seem to be intent on injecting medievalism—remember the good old Dark Ages when Latin was king and people were brainwashed by the Roman Catholic Church?—into the homeschooling movement.) But again, if Sissy had expressed her knowledge of horses, how would she have done so apart from facts?

Cothran claims, “We, like Gradgrind, think that knowing about something is the same thing as knowing it. We think truth is possessed merely by knowing information, that by merely assenting to a proposition about something, we have understood it. But anyone who has read a great novel (Dickens’ *Hard Times*, or any other), knows that is not true. In fact, is there a better expression of the limitations of the modern lust for information than Dickens’ fictional account?”

Cothran has fallen for the notion that knowing something and knowing about it are two different things. What these people fail to do is satisfactorily explain how one can know something apart from knowing about it, and how we can know about something, perhaps know a lot about it, but not know it. We often hear this in regard to Jesus. A preacher might ask, “You might know a lot about Jesus, but do you know Jesus?” What is he talking about? It’s a good question.

Good Ol’ Bill

Suppose there is someone named Bill Jones. You know that he is a dealer in the poisonous snakes of South America. You know that he is now in his 50s, and has written a well-received book relating his capture and narrow escape from a head-hunting sub-tribe of the Shuar Indians of the Amazon Basin.

I, on the other hand, grew up with Bill. We were childhood friends, off on adventures after school every day. We even went through college together, dated the same co-eds, and married girls who were also each other’s best friends. Flying a two-seater plane together, we crashed in the Chilean Andes. After I slipped from a rock ledge, Bill risked his life to save me as I hung from a sapling overhanging a drop of 4,300 feet. We survived for 63 days with nothing but two knives, Bill’s compass, and my *Roget’s Pocket Thesaurus* before we reached the village of Baños Morales, where we were promptly arrested as American spies and spent 142 days, 9 hours and 17 minutes in a

dungeon. I think Bill would have gone insane staring at those four walls if I had not forced him to memorize all 395 word entries, including the adjectives, in *Roget's* for the word "success."

We were finally released when a British archaeologist (name withheld) came through the village, heard of our arrest, and managed to bribe a high-ranking official with a copy of P. G. Wodehouse's *Mulliner Omnibus* that he was embarrassed to find in his luggage (it was overdue by five months from the Wotton-under-Edge public library). Not wanting to be obligated, Bill repaid the man's kindness with a generous contribution toward the refurbishing of the Wotton Electric Picture House (which then became famous as the first all-digital cinema in the UK, with sweets and drinks at modest prices but with no popcorn on environmental grounds). Yes, after spending that much time together, I know Bill. But is this really any different than knowing about Bill? No.*

Just the Facts, Ma'am

The real distinction between your knowledge of Bill and mine is degree. It lies in the number of facts and how well I understand the relationship between those facts. By spending so much time with Bill, in so many different circumstances, I have accumulated, both consciously and subconsciously, more facts about Bill than you have. I can put those facts together into a better understanding of Bill than you can. But knowing Bill is the same as knowing about Bill. There is no difference. You know a little about Bill: I know a lot about Bill.

Preachers who know what they are talking about know that knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus are not what is at issue. What is important is that some people know many facts about Jesus, but they miss those that are essential, those that must be revealed by the Father in heaven. The unsaved person does not know Jesus as His Lord and Savior. Cothran's distinction between knowing and knowing about is false because there is no way to know something other than knowing about it. It is a collection of facts and a synthesis of the relationship between the facts.

Oh yes, we might be able to express these facts from an internal point of view and we might be able to make them more vivid. Sissy Jupe might include in her description of a horse how riding one makes her heart pound as she feels the power of its muscles beneath her, how she can make it go faster by speaking softly into its ear, and how the smell of a horse being groomed always brings back memories of home.

But these are still facts. They may merely have other, more subjective, facts tagged onto them. Thomas Gradgrind may have been mistaken to think that a handful of scattered facts could sufficiently sum up what a horse is to his students. But the problem was not in the fact that they were facts; the problem lay in not having enough facts!

What has this to do with fiction and nonfiction and what our children should read? Just this: facts are not something to be handled with ice tongs as cold and sterile and something to be avoided whenever possible. Nor is fiction always to be shunned as fluff and nonsense.

Fiction can convey truth. Truth can be conveyed in stories in a number of ways. One way is in historical events around which a story is woven (historical fiction). But truth can also be conveyed in the underlying meaning of a story. No one is going to say the following words from *Alice* are truth:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

But the overall message of the story shows us the hypocrisies and inanities of our society, and does so in a way that is entertaining. Lewis Carroll and Jonathan Swift were masters at doing this. So, we might say their stories convey truth, but it is in the underlying meaning. But this underlying meaning is not isolated from fact. It is still a fact or a set of facts. What people seem to get confused over is that facts can be presented in many ways, but they are still facts.

For example, we can present facts chronologically. This can help us see the sweep of history and the unfolding of God's plan. Facts can also be systematized. This can help us see their relation to one another. This is done in systematic theology. But we can also present facts in a fictionalized form.

I might write a nonfiction book that goes through the events of the Civil War chronologically. Or, I might write a book about the Civil War in which I arrange the facts of the Civil War using a system other than time order. I might put them into alphabetical order (such as in an encyclopedia of the Civil War), or I might systematize them by category (politics, economics, war strategies, battles), or I might choose to arrange the facts in my book another way. In any of these

books, I might also include some comments about my personal feelings toward war.

But I might also write a historical novel about a boy who lived during the Civil War. The boy did not really exist, and some of the events around him might not really have happened. But many real facts about the Civil War are presented as the story unfolds. So, in this fiction, many true facts are presented. I might also write the story in such a way that it depicts the horrors of war. In fact, if I am a good fiction writer, I might be able to write this in such a way that my message of the horrors of war has a very profound effect upon the reader (as much as, or even more than, a nonfiction presentation of the horrors of war would). But herein lies a danger of fiction.

The Worlds of Fiction

When an author writes fiction, he is creating his own world. Remember from the definition of fiction that it is invented by the imagination. While Jones and Cothran want us to believe that fiction can be truer than nonfiction, the fact is that fiction can just as easily present lies. Like an artist working with clay, a fiction writer molds the world of his story. Not only does it have its own characters and events, but it also has its own ethics.

When we read nonfiction, we are more likely to have our guard up. We think, is this true or not? is this argument valid or not? But when we read fiction, the author's ethics, which are interwoven into an entertaining story, may get past our guard.

Writers can and do write stories in which they try to get their readers to sympathize and even agree with actions that are contrary to the readers' normal morality. Christians may find themselves emotionally sympathizing with actions and characters that are opposed to what we learn from the Bible. By cleverly crafting his story, a writer may get readers to side with an adulterer, sympathize with a thief, be angry with those hunting down a murderer, or try to manipulate readers against lawful government. Such fiction isn't truth; it is a lie.

Some writers truly want to change society to more closely match their personal ethics. They know that they will likely not make much headway with one book. But they know that, over time and many books, they and similarly minded colleagues may succeed in desensitizing readers away from their morals. To be fair, some writers

may do this without intending to, by simply injecting their ethics into the story. Either way, when we open the cover of a book, we are about to be influenced by someone else's mind, and we should be careful.

Our Children Need Our Protection

What is true for adult fiction is also true for children's fiction. I am convinced that many children's writers think it is their duty to influence children away from the moral and religious standards of their parents. For example, children's fiction that promotes the idea that lying to parents is okay because parents are "dumb," old-fashioned, and will never understand is about as common as grass on a lawn. If these authors have as their goal to alienate children from their parents, they are going about it the right way.

Jesus said Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). It was Satan who successfully used lies to turn Adam and Eve's moral standards against their Father, God. Many writers today seem to want to walk in the path of their father, the devil.

I am not saying that moms and dads should only let their children read what agrees with their family's values. Reading exposes us to a variety of ideas. This can be good. After all, our children will be exposed to these ideas sooner or later, and it is better to be exposed to these ideas in the relative safety of home. But I want to express my concern that the wrong ideas at the wrong age can be harmful. That is, even if a child has the reading ability to read a certain book, the contents of the book may make it inappropriate.

Of course, as children grow older, we must allow them to face more of the world so they can learn to handle it. Their exposure to certain subjects in fiction is a part of this. But as parents, we must realize that children do not have adult critical thinking skills, are easily influenced, and need our protection. We should, as much as possible, be the ones who decide what they are exposed to and at what age. For example, I do not want my eight year old reading stories that contain sexual experimentation, alternate (read homosexual) lifestyles, drugs, or sorcery whether these things are promoted or not. They are simply not appropriate subjects for little children. And neither would I want a twelve year old to be reading novels that subtly or not-so-subtly promote these practices. When the time comes for a child to be introduced to the existence of these things, then sit down together and read a book that addresses the topic. That way, you have the opportunity to discuss the issues.

By the way, the Bible doesn't tell us that we need to learn about evil in order to avoid it. Over and over, the Scriptures tell us to learn what is good and simply reject whatever doesn't match it. What we read is what we put into our minds, and the Bible gives us a principle: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Weakening the Mind

Even good fiction can be a problem when there is too much of it. Fiction always takes place in a fictional world. No matter how close a writer tries to get to reality, his world is never close enough. Just the fact that it is entertaining reading brings it out of reality. It is simply not possible to really convey in an entertaining book the every day world of work, school lessons, and drudgery that we must all face. Likewise, a book's problems lie between its covers, while the problems we face in the real world often simply go on. It is all too easy for a child to run from the real world and hide in a fictional story.

Simply put, too much fiction can weaken the mind so that it rebels against the obligations of the real world or even the straightforwardness of nonfiction reading. This can make educating children or teaching them the responsibility of chores a nightmare. After all, how do you get a child to buckle down to math when his or her head is spinning with swords, pirates, castles, and dragons? It is because of the competition from fiction that so many have tried to make teaching more "entertaining" for the child (and exhausting for the teacher or parent). And how will children learn that, like most people, they will need to make a living working at an ordinary job when they continually read about characters who seem to never lack funds as they run around the world solving mysteries, spend most of their lives riding dirt bikes, or make a living as pirates?

I think this writer sums up this problem very well:

Most young persons are excessively fond of novels and romances. Of this our circulating libraries are full proof, and the rapidity with which a new tale is known to sell, while a book of religious, or some other useful topic, is but

seldom enquired after.

All novels are not equally injurious. Discrimination is just, but young people will not discriminate. They like any thing that moves their feelings, and that most which moves their feelings most. Novels are not the picture of real life, although they are usually designed to be such. "They paint beauty in colours more charming than nature, and describe happiness that never existed." The consequence is that young people, who have formed their ideas of the world from novels, sigh after that which the world can never afford. They are unfitted for the delights of ordinary society—Every thing to them is insipid, because it has not the high seasoning of a fiction—And after all their pretended knowledge of human nature, they are really ignorant of what is the state of the world, because they had been accustomed to contemplate it in a higher state of perfection than it ever can exhibit.... A high excitement must be produced, or there is no pleasure. Ordinary conversation loses its relish. Ordinary scenes of social intercourse become tiresome. No intellectual delight is afforded, because they have not improved their intellects. Hence they must seek other pleasures—other means of exciting their feelings and gratifying their passions.... On these amusements I will not enlarge, but only ask, are they authorized by the Bible? Do they accord with the precepts of Christ?—Are they congenial with the spirit and temper of Christianity? Do those who attend them love their God, the Saviour, their Bible, their secret and public devotions?—are they not for the most unthinking, irreligious, and profane? Is not their conversation and conduct for the most part at war with every principle of virtue and piety? If so, their amusements are sources of corruption, they are attended at the expense not only of time and property, but of conscience and the interest of eternity. Their indulgence will plant thorns in a dying bed, and fill the soul with unutterable anguish in the prospect of judgment.

("Novels and Romances," The Guardian, or Youth's Religious Instructor, 1820, 369-70)

Having trouble getting your children to concentrate on their lessons? Here's what the same writer quoted above says: "Rarely will a youth engage with assiduity, or even without disgust, in a study requiring mental exertion, immediately after his mind has been relaxed and

debilitated; his taste, if not his heart corrupted; and his soul kindled into ardour at scenes of imagined bliss, which probably he will never realize, but which will only prepare his mind for bitter disappointment.”

I have found this to be true in our family. Television is not the only way to create a lazy mind. When children are exposed to too much fiction in any form, they quickly develop distaste for nonfiction, any form of learning, and any mental or physical exertion that does not thrill them to the tips of their toes. They want only the ready-made daydreams of fiction.

Summary

And so, this is a complex subject. As parents, we must pray for wisdom. Although it is possible to overprotect a child, we must not cave in to worldly pressure to under-protect. We should screen what our children read, both fiction and nonfiction, but we must be especially careful to analyze the underlying messages being conveyed in the fiction. I believe that, as our children grow older and we introduce them to more complex issues, we should read stories that deal with these topics with our children so that we have an opportunity to discuss them. We must also be careful to limit the amount of fiction so that it does not cause our children to dread nonfiction, lesson work, and mental and manual labor.

* Of course, this is all just fiction. Or is it? Can you tell what's true from what isn't?