“The challenge of training godly children in an ungodly environment is not essentially different than it was during the New Testament era or during most of the Old Testament era. The so-called elite movers and shakers of the world have always promoted a worldview that defies God. What is different today is that the media and secular public education along with the weakening of family structures and a lessening of family time together have intensified the bombardment of Christian children with ungodly influences. This book provides guidance for pastors, teachers, and parents to help them understand and counter the forces that are trying to pull their children away from God. It does not offer quick-fix solutions but provides help for designing and implementing a battle plan in this struggle. This is a challenging book to confront a challenging problem.”

—Dr. John F. Brug
The Wartburg Project

“The challenge to faithfully follow Christ in the midst of a fallen and hostile world is not new, but in the West after Christendom, it is often not only demanding but also frustrating, bewildering, and discouraging. Using a wealth of scriptural narratives and encouragement, Kremer exhorts his reader to greet this challenge not with trepidation or resignation, but with conviction, resolution, and even confident joy. Such purposeful Christian living is essential, because, as the author rightly insists, the stakes are extraordinarily, indeed, eternally high.”

—Dr. Joel Biermann
Professor of Systematic Theology
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

“Kenn Kremer writes a compelling call to action for Christians concerned about reflecting godly character in an increasingly secular and godless culture. He explains how biblical truths, both Law and Gospel, apply to Christians today. He contrasts a secular, godless worldview that emphasizes material worth and self-glorification with a Christian worldview that emphasizes eternal truths and glorification of the triune God rather than self. The book and discussion guide are valuable resources for Christians, especially pastors, teachers, leaders, and parents as they raise, teach, and
support God’s children in the development of godly characteristics in an ungodly culture.”

—Dr. Carla Melendy
Professor Emeritus
Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

“Kenneth Kremer’s Embracing Godly Character: The Christian Community’s Response to a Godless Culture surveys the cultural confusion swirling all around today’s Christian family, and, from the high ground of Scripture, points us back to joy, peace, and blessings founded in God’s promises. Kremer’s broad review includes a useful chapter-by-chapter discussion guide to help us approach many practicalities of living in a godly way. And don’t miss the short, topical Bible studies embedded in footnotes; these are hidden gems! All in all, this book provides a bracing reality check and a thought-provoking strategic perspective. I like this book!”

—Dr. Jesse Yow
Author of Standing Firm: A Christian Response to Hostility and Persecution

“Embracing Godly Character is an enjoyable read. Kenn uses an interesting blend of history, God’s Word, and a Lutheran lens to put our modern cultural dilemmas into context. He provides excellent insights for both individuals and family leaders about how to combat modern culture’s negative influence on spiritual character, and he does it in a very readable format. Thanks, Kenn, for giving voice to what many Christians have sensed but not been able to clearly articulate.”

—Dr. John Meyer
Director of Graduate Studies
Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

“This well-written book speaks sharply to our turbulent times and calls us from complacency about the surrounding culture. Kremer urges us to focus on our family life. Firmly based on Scripture, he shows how Christian character and worldview are developed. Kremer skillfully distinguishes the place of personal identity as primary and how in the Christian alone this finds true synthesis with how we should act. This book can be a very useful tool for discussion in a church study group. Young parents setting
the tone in their homes will especially benefit. All who are concerned for the children of the Church will feel a renewed spirit.”

—Dr. Paul R. Boehlke
Professor Emeritus of Biology, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, WI
Adjunct Instructor, Graduate Studies, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

“‘God is my refuge and strength. . . . ’ These words have been recited by Christians worldwide for thousands of years through times of great distress. We live in such times. Opposition to Christianity now works to intimidate God’s people into silence. Kenn Kremer’s book reminds us that the Gospel is timeless, that biblical teaching is the source of all true knowledge, and is still ‘an ever-present help in trouble.’ This book points to the dangers, new and old, that we must endure on our pathway to our heavenly home. It is an invaluable reminder and encouragement for the Christian parent, minister, teacher, employee, and public servant.”

—Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt
WI State Assembly—52nd District

“Jesus tells His followers that although we are in the world, we are not of the world. How, then, shall we live—especially as we find ourselves in an increasingly godless and Christ-less culture? Kenneth Kremer takes up the challenge, enlisting a wide range of historical and contemporary sources along with years of personal experience in the teaching and writing ministries. Above all, he draws deeply from the most reliable source of guidance, the Holy Scriptures. Embracing Godly Character focuses on Christian homes, but individuals and church groups will also find this an excellent guide to living for our Savior.”

—Dr. Roland Cap Ehlke
Professor of Philosophy at Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, WI
Author of Like a Pelting Rain: The Making of the Modern Mind
Embracing Godly Character
The Christian Community’s Response to a Godless Culture

Kenneth Kremer
In loving memory of my dear mother,
Lydia C. Kremer,
1921–2016
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One of the most important Irish-Anglo statesmen of Western Civilization was Edmund Burke. He also penned the most famous antirevolutionary book ever written, warning that revolution in France would end up with violence and bloodshed in the streets. Burke was prophetic; the revolution failed, and the great man’s insight has come to be seen as a glory and a roadmap after the tragedy of Paris.

Burke showed that any country, culture, or civilization that does not place virtue at the center of what it means to be a good citizen—and especially among the young—is a country, culture, and civilization that is hollow and doomed. Burke’s greatest insight was that morals and manners mattered more than laws and statutes.

Kenneth Kremer has written a truly wonderful and even profound book. He aims not to whistle down the wind of our chaotic climate but rather to float an elemental idea that has power. He says that if moms and dads want to raise great kids, they ought to pay attention—from first to last—to their children’s character; their moral architecture; their manners. He shows why habituating integrity from the youngest of ages is a powerful antidote to the cultural tsunami in which we find ourselves awash.

Yet the mastery of his prose and the generosity of his soul is not a point-by-point analysis of what needs to be done to raise a great generation of young people. Instead, he points to the holy cross of mercy and grace and says that the way forward for Christians in this troubled era is to preoccupy ourselves with influencing, shaping, and molding godly character. What a refreshing and nourishing prospect.

But how does one embrace such a character, and what does it mean to be godly? The book unfolds like a soft Irish rain: no knuckles in the chest. No gloom and doom. No major warnings. Instead, Kremer restates the first principles of the Christian life and finds a tender manner and idiom of reintroducing those principles for this new and sometimes brutal and asymmetrical era.

A great president of the United States once posited that “There is no better way to establish hope for the future than to enlighten young minds.” Kremer is keen to enlighten young hearts and souls too. His end point is a grace note and a very fine read.

Tim Goeglein

Tim Goeglein is Vice President for External Relations at Focus on the Family and a Senior Fellow at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC. He served in high-level government posts for the past two decades. He worked as Special Assistant to President George W. Bush, where he was the Deputy Director of the White House Office of Public Liaison from 2001 to 2008. Goeglein is the author of the political memoir *The Man in the Middle: An Inside Account of Faith and Politics in the George W. Bush Era.*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I look back four years to the beginning of this project, I realize now that it never could have happened without the help and encouragement of a small army. Ryan Olson, for example, suggested I read James Davison Hunter, Joel Beiermann, Charles Taylor, James K. A. Smith, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These writers and thinkers provided a philosophical framework. Philip Koelpin insisted I reread Siegbert Becker’s classic *The Foolishness of God* and C. F. W. Walther’s timeless *God’s No and God’s Yes*. Their contributions became the theological and historical foundation. Matthew Hoehner suggested I take a look at *The Genius of Luther’s Theology* by Robert Kolb and Charles Arand. The view was breathtaking. Paul Boehlke encouraged me to read Martin Galstad’s *Findings*—simply profound. Roland Cap Ehlke encouraged me to take a look at *The Law above the Law* by John Warwick Montgomery—a brilliant work. Thank you to all who contributed to the project’s literary and biblical perspective.

I was also blessed with some of the best critics anyone could want, including my graduate students at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, a district conference that met in 2015 in Findlay, Ohio, and a cadre of ministry associates in the Appleton area. The thoughtful readings of portions of the manuscript by the following individuals helped guide the project’s progress: Carla Melendy, Paul Boehlke, Ronald Gorske, James Westendorf, Mark and Molly Parsons, Adam Zimplemann, Andrea Vinji, John Roekle, Kenneth Kratz, John Juern, James Pope, Jonathan Kuske, Thomas Mielke, John Miller, William Monday, Benjamin Burger, and Jonathan Ruddat. Kati Guenterberg and Rosie Bunnow edited sections of the manuscript. Bless you all for your generosity and willingness to help.

I am especially indebted to Roland Cap Ehlke for his edit of the original manuscript. Cap, your insights gave me a clear path to completing the project. I also want to acknowledge the wonderful people at CPH. In particular, a special thank you goes out to Laura Lane, Joe Willmann, and Peter Jurchen. I will always cherish your friendship and the professional commitment you made to this project.

Finally, I daily thank God for the loving support and selfless patience of my dear wife, Marlis. The countless hours we spent together discussing culture, worldviews, and her discerning thoughts about the formation of biblical character were truly priceless. I am even more grateful for making me her own special project in life. Bless you, Dear Heart. —KJK
INTRODUCTION

It should not shock us anymore to hear that we live in a godless culture. Historians are calling it the Post-Christian Era. Of course, this doesn’t mean that God has abandoned us. It means that a lot of people have abandoned Him in favor of the many godless “isms” that flourish in society today—materialism, humanism, existentialism, secularism, pluralism, Spiritism, atheism, and others. For a growing number of Americans, the Bible seems quaint—a literary relic. Some even think of Christianity as being countercultural.

In spite of secular philosophies and profane worldviews, God is still speaking to us. The inspired words of Scripture are His. His Law still demands holiness. His essential message is still life and light. The Gospel comforts, encourages, gives hope to fallen mankind. It saves. God is not dead. He is alive forever. He has not moved to an undisclosed location. He is with us and blesses us, as He has promised. Knowing this is important, because the unbelieving world would like us to think that the message of salvation in Christ is falling on deaf ears.

The discussion that follows is unapologetic about its headwaters for truth. God’s Word is our stronghold—our anchor in a riotous sea of change. We trust it to be as relevant today as it was in any other season of our world’s history. If we are to understand what godly character is, how it is formed, or why the interaction between character and culture is so important, we will want God’s Word shedding its light on our conversation.

For anyone looking for a prophetic view of where our culture is headed, this book isn’t for you. It may also disappoint some to learn this book is not a rant about the decline of Western civilization, the fall of democracy, or the demise of capitalism. It does not represent a call for expanding alternate educational models—homeschooling, online education, and the like. While we have the utmost respect for good science and empirical data, the case being made is not of human origin; it is informed by the impeccable truth of divinely inspired Scripture and not by statistical evidence. Nor will politics have a voice. Our intent is to hold the higher ground of God’s inspired Word, where spirit and truth are golden and the miracle of salvation is the pearl of supreme worth. We will not, per se, be discussing the Bible’s position regarding specific sins and godless lifestyles—materialism and greed, the LGBTQ movement, urban violence, pornography, abortion, human slavery, turning a blind eye to hunger and poverty, racial and ethnic tensions, euthanasia, and so on. These conversations are desperately needed among God’s people, but each is deserving of a separate study. We have also resisted the urge to turn the clock back to a romanticized version of the past. We will, however, pay our respects to history every now and then, to gain insights regarding causes and
EMBRACING GODLY CHARACTER

effects. We will make a serious effort to understand the complex, confusing, and ever-changing present age. And we will discuss what makes people distinctively human without injecting the mandatory conversations about the ego, the id, or personality types.

In the final analysis, this book’s main thrust will center on the Christian community’s response to a culture that is becoming increasingly unsympathetic to believers. More than anything, this is a book about priming the pump for an overdue conversation about raising a godly family in a culture that is, at its core, secular. The book’s message, then, is intended first for parents.

In the Bible, parents are understood as God’s frontline warriors. They are the vanguard for shaping the next generation’s moral views. Parenting is a vocational calling of unselfish leadership and humble, personal ministry. For those readers who do not like to be overwhelmed with details, this book’s main body offers a quick, easy read that builds a case for encouraging Christian fathers and mothers to commit themselves to a more robust exercise of their family’s faith life at home. Discussion questions have been added to stimulate productive conversations among parents (see Appendix A: Discussion Guide).

There is also an urgent need to generate a lively conversation among leaders of the organized church—pastors, ministry teams, lay ministers, and Christian educators—about spiritual life in the privacy of our homes. Change doesn’t happen without a firm commitment from called church leaders. Members rely on their leaders, especially their pastors, to provide guidance in developing ministry plans, constructing program elements, setting aside budgetary resources, and making sure their church’s ministry plan is being implemented. Appended study aids have been included in the book to assist in developing some of the more pressing discussion topics. A free set of thought-provoking discussion points entitled “Conversation Starters for Church Leaders” is available at the Steeples website: embracingchristiancharacter.com.

In a culture ever morphing and constantly mutating, we need to assess the damage that our changing culture has done to the Christian family over the last half century. In the following pages, we will consider the who, what, when, where, and how of character formation. We will talk about the influence that our changing culture has had on character. We will address questions about moral authority and examine aspects of biblical character that have been forgotten, ignored, or hijacked by popular norms. With a humble and prayerful heart, we will discuss strategies for reaching inward with the Gospel to the members of our own families and outward with that same Good News to a world languishing in unbelief.

This is a conversation that cannot be dismissed. To be frank, it is not without risk or peril. We all struggle to become the kind of people God intended us to be.
Yet, we fail frequently and are often disappointed in the behaviors of our fellow Christians. As you approach these chapters, come with a Bible in your hand and a prayer on your lips. Then relax. As God’s Word has promised, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).
A Parable

There once lived a Christian man, who loved his wife and children deeply. In the spring of their lives, the man worked very hard to provide for his family. He made every effort to be a loyal companion to his wife and an exemplary father to his children. In time, he saved enough money to build a beautiful, new house—a haven, safe from wild animals and shielded from noisy neighbors. Many other people settled in the same green valley. The opportunities for making new friends, attending new schools, exploring new shopping centers, and finding new jobs increased quickly.

As the valley’s population grew, the man’s children gathered new ideas from the melting pot of cultural backgrounds. They rubbed elbows every day with them. The man’s children seemed to thrive on the freedom to shape their own identity without boundaries or restraints of any kind. The man thought, This is good. Now my children can truly become their own persons and create their own destinies in life.

As the leaves turned from green to orange, the man noticed a draft wafting through the hallways of his new house. This will never do, he thought. Winter will soon be upon us. If I do not insulate my house against the cold, we will freeze. So, the man weather-stripped all the doors and windows and put a thick layer of insulation in the attic.

Soon the gales of November whistled in from the north, but the house still was not airtight. The cold crept in beneath the floorboards and through the tiny cracks by the windowsills. No one complained. In fact, they hardly noticed the cold because the family’s collective hearts were being warmed by a new kind of sharing. The man’s family had become connected with all the other people on the globe by a magic device. This, too, hastened the day when each child would become his or her own person.
The man’s family seemed happy, but the man was troubled. With each passing day, he felt more alone. He also saw that his children talked less with one another or their father and mother. He wondered what good a family was if its members stopped laughing together and working together. He noticed that the neighbors didn’t seem as neighborly either. People moved in and out of their homes quickly. No one could keep up with the changing names and faces living on their block. Even the local church seemed to be in distress. Church members began to distance themselves from one another, until many of them forgot why they had belonged to a church in the first place.

Finally, the man instructed his family to come together in a room every day to talk and live like a family. But by this time, each child had become his or her own person, so the room they were all told to gather in remained empty and cold.

The December blizzards came, and the man’s family huddled under piles of blankets, shivering. In desperation, the man hired experts to add new layers of high-tech, pink insulation around the outside walls of the house. Experts would know just how thick the insulation had to be. New technologies were being invented all the time—one to deal with inclement weather, another to fight illness, one to escape gravity’s pull, and one to make crops produce more food. If people didn’t have the appropriate technology to overcome a certain problem, they would invent one.

The days of raging blizzards soon turned into weeks of subzero temperatures. The man was beside himself to find a solution to the bitter cold outside. Sometimes, he wondered how he might have built his home differently.

Then one brutally cold January morning, the man awoke to find himself alone. A note on the kitchen table explained, “We’ve gone to look for a home with a warm fire burning in the hearth.”
Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

—John 3:3
CHAPTER 1

HIGH-LEVEL CONVERSATIONS

In biblical times, the formation of godly character often involved conversations that occurred in unusual circumstances. Abraham, for example, found his identity on a mountaintop, with a knife in his hand and his son Isaac laid out before him like a sacrificial lamb (see Genesis 22:1–14). When God provided a ram that would be accepted as Isaac's substitute, Abraham gratefully named that mountain “The LORD will provide” (Genesis 22:14). Queen Esther's moment of truth happened as she calmly stood before the throne of her husband-king, who had the power to execute her for entering his throne room without an invitation. God had placed Esther into this dangerous position and given her the courage to stand firm in the face of death in order to preserve the ancestral line for the promised Messiah. That bloodline needed to remain intact to fulfill God's prophecies concerning His eternal plan to save humankind from sin's curse (Esther 4–5). Elijah discovered his identity when he finally understood God's identity. It happened when he heard the gentle, whispered voice of his almighty God's infinite love (1 Kings 19). Jonah discovered who he was from inside the belly of a giant fish (Jonah 1).

One of the most captivating character meetings of all time was also one of the Bible's briefest conversations. It took place on a rocky outcropping outside Jerusalem's walls. The Romans used the site to execute criminals. On this day, the city was shrouded in an eerie pall of darkness. Three men were being crucified. The character of the man hanging on the center cross was as pure and innocent as the driven snow. Yet, He had been tried and found guilty by a corrupt Sanhedrin that
heard false testimony and brought bogus charges against Him. The final orders for His execution had come at the hands of the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

The name of the man hanging on that center cross was Jesus. The name means “The LORD Is Our Salvation.” His countenance was darker than the skies over Jerusalem. He was carrying the guilt of the entire human race to His death. This dying Jesus was God’s sacrificial offering—the Lamb of God—His only Son.

The Romans had spiked Jesus’ hands and feet to a makeshift cross. There, He would hang, suspended between heaven and earth for six agonizing hours, finally offering Himself up in death as the full ransom to buy back His rebellious creatures from sin’s curse.

The hearts of the men being crucified on either side of Jesus were also cloaked in darkness. One felon was so stonyhearted from evil influences that all he could do was curse the Romans and demean Jesus for thinking He was some kind of king.

The other fellow’s heart was darkened more by his haunting memories of the depraved life he had lived. It was clear, even to himself, that he was not a good man. Though we don’t know for sure, one can imagine how he could not remember doing one decent thing for anyone. It’s likely that he felt just as guilty about the good he had never done as he did about the awful things he had done.

Who could love a person like that? Yet, Jesus seemed to take an interest in this man’s parting agony.

The thief wished his life might still be acknowledged by someone. Perhaps he wondered what harm there would be in sharing a final thought—a prayer, of sorts—addressed to the man at the center of everyone’s attention. “Jesus,” he said, “remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

It didn’t take long for the man to get a response. “Truly, I say to you,” replied Jesus, “today you will be with Me in paradise” (v. 43). End of conversation.

We can only guess how the thief tried to grasp the implications of what he had just heard. Could he have wondered what he might have said or done to deserve such a grand promise? We can speculate that he had begun the conversation with the hope that his life might still be given some significance. Being remembered by the Son of God would have arisen far above such hope. In the blink of an eye, everything changed. Death was now the man’s passage to immortality. New life was in his grasp. His tortured final moments were bathed in light and filled with joy. The man knew Jesus. He knew Jesus’ heart, His forgiveness, His holy love. What irony! With only hours remaining, the man had suddenly received purpose and meaning for a life that only minutes earlier had been completely worthless. He had come to identify himself with the dying man on the center cross. Jesus was
his Savior, his Lord of life. With whatever time was left, we assume he would have quietly glorified his Lord Jesus in the privacy of his heart. Soon, his everlasting future would be spent in the eternal kingdom paradise that Jesus had been referring to, joyfully doing the same.

These are, of course, not the only lives God has touched. Our conversation will embrace other changes of the heart that are just as miraculous, including yours and mine.

When it comes to character, change is a great place to begin. The formation of godly character always involves change that is radical, ongoing, and compelling. Change is one of the dynamics that will drive our conversation.

**DEFINING CHARACTER**

Coming to a clear understanding of my “self” is a lifelong learning curve. As a critical element in the shaping of character, learning is one of the most important kinds of change any human being can experience. The prolific author and lecturer Stanley Hauerwas, a champion of the virtue-ethics movement of the 1980s and ’90s, famously writes, “Ethics is never finally a matter of theory; rather, it is a reflective activity not easily learned.”

The forming of human character is actually a lifetime learning process. What we are becoming depends largely on a combination of human experiences and influences. But the Bible tells us there is more to the story of our moral formation. Scripture says that every human being is born with a sense of what is moral and what is not, and this innate sense rests in what believers understand as a divine ethic.

So, in moral terms, we do not arrive in this life with a blank slate.

Dwight L. Moody (1837–99), a popular theologian in the latter half of the nineteenth century, exposed a disturbing aspect of human character. Moody said, “Character is what you are in the dark.”

His definition implies the presence of sin in every human heart. He is suggesting that character is who I am, warts and all. Moody was right. We must all learn the truth about our evil desires and inclinations. We must know, too, the dreadful consequences for sin, the shame connected with sin, and the hopeless damage our own immoral living has done to destroy our relationship with our righteous and loving God.

Our sinful behavior has not only destroyed our relationship with God, but it also has the potential to ruin our relationships with family members, friends,

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colleagues, and neighbors. Knowing this, we quickly learn to hide our most repulsive thoughts and behaviors from others, often with sneaky deception. We know, only too well, that the nasty truth about how we conduct our lives undermines the trust others have placed in us. For this reason, every child instinctively knows what it is to tell a lie.

Godly character begins with integrity. Any honest study of character must account for the masks we wear to conceal our moral flaws. But in that same discussion, we will also note the biblical truth that our masks of disgrace are transformed by faith in Jesus. The image others see when they are faced with someone of truly Christian character is Christ. To say that in a slightly different way, godly men, women, and children are the masks God wears when He wants to project His goodness and love to His own people and the unbelieving world.

A revolutionary thinker of his day, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) was an early advocate for letting character gel on its own. In an era when educational models were very different from contemporary learning models, Rousseau opposed public education, favoring a more natural path. Rousseau assumed that children can find their own way in life if they merely recognize that, as equals to all others, their calling is to be a decent human being. The following quote from Rousseau’s book *Emile or On Education* gives us a sense of his worldview regarding the formation of character and explains why Rousseau’s writings still influence our culture today.

> Our true study is that of the human condition. He among us who best knows how to bear the goods and the ills of this life is to my taste the best raised: from which it follows that the true education consists less in precept than in practice. We begin to instruct ourselves when we begin to live. Our education begins with us.5

Rousseau’s entire focus was on serving the needs of this life. He was most concerned about satisfying the needs of the self. Rousseau’s worldview reflects a human perspective. It is secular and bears all the marks of humanism before it was fashionable. And many of Rousseau’s ideas are embedded in our nation’s founding principles. His understanding of what constitutes a decent human being is not biblical, though it is understandable from a human standpoint. While unbelievers

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4 See Appendix B: Biblical Character.

insist that every human being should “know thyself;” God’s Word makes it clear that our highest priority in life is to know God and His love for us.

Speaking about knowledge and the role education plays in building character, Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) declared,

> Education has for its object the formation of character. To curb restive propensities, to awaken dormant sentiments, to strengthen the perceptions and cultivate the tastes, to encourage this feeling and repress that, so as finally to develop the child into a man of well proportioned and harmonious nature—this is alike the aim of parent and teacher.²

Today, in an age of early education, powerful delivery systems for every subject, and individualized learning strategies, character building should engage parents and teachers in a common cause. But Spencer wrote these words before the American Civil War. He believed that the only meaningful philosophical problems are those that can be solved by logical analysis. God’s Word doesn’t always line up with the logical analysis of human thought.³ Rational human logic has little tolerance for angels, a heavenly kingdom, miracles, prayer, a physical resurrection, or a belief system that rests on the notion of God’s boundless grace. Spencer wasn’t speaking about the kind of character Christian parents want for their children. He was proposing a kind of character that would fit the needs of an enlightened society that was eager to replace biblical truth with secular ideas that would make life in the here and now more tolerable. To accomplish this, it was necessary to invent the diabolical myth that human beings are inherently good. Where that lie serves as the foundation for a conversation about ethics, God’s people need to talk about character and its formation in an environment enlightened by biblical truth.

**A CONVERSATION ABOUT MORALITY**

In recent decades, much of the serious talk about character has gone underground. It doesn’t help that the popular culture surrounds us with messages that promote self-image, self-confidence, self-improvement, and self-importance. Today, character is defined as “innate,” and it is framed as a system of self-generated values. *Innate* means we are born with it. When challenged, some will even excuse their behavior, saying, “This is the way God made me.” To say it is “self-generated”

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