

KARL GRAUSTEIN WITH MARK JACOBSEN

GROWING UP CHRISTIAN

*"Helps Christian teens to
count their blessings and
pray for more."*

—MARVIN OLASKY

Have you taken ownership of your relationship with God?



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1 CHURCH KIDS

THE DYNAMICS OF GROWING UP CHRISTIAN

Saturday—1:00 A.M.

This is wrong.

Kara's conscience seemed to roar through the dark, silent house. She cringed and froze midstep, heart thundering so loudly she felt certain the sound would awaken her parents. When she'd made her plans this morning, sneaking out hadn't seemed like a big deal, but now the fear and guilt were so overwhelming, she thought she might throw up.

She spotted movement in the living room, and jumped a foot off the ground. For one horrified moment she was convinced that her father was sitting in his easy chair; then she realized that it was just a shadow shifting across the floor, as tree branches swayed outside the window. She gulped an uneasy breath. Kara had no idea what her punishment would be if her parents caught her, but she knew they would be disappointed in her. That was an awful thought. She suddenly wanted more than anything to go upstairs and crawl back into bed, but then she thought of Nick sitting in his Mustang waiting for her. She couldn't just ditch him tonight. She'd promised.

When Kara had met Nick at a youth-group retreat last June, she'd never imagined things taking this turn. Both were sincere Christians who had strong convictions about their faith and their integrity. They even led worship together at Sunday evening youth group, but lately Kara's grades had been slipping, and her parents and friends were getting concerned about the amount of time that she and Nick were spending together. Two weeks ago, her parents had tightened her curfew and placed some limits on how much time she could spend with Nick. Kara knew they were trying to protect her, but she loved Nick, and the new rules seemed unreasonable. Last week she'd broken them twice. Worse, she'd lied to her parents about where she'd been. Tonight, sneaking out in the middle of the night, things were taking an even worse turn. Kara felt awful. She knew the guilt would be especially acute tomorrow evening, when she and Nick stood up to lead worship at youth group.

It felt so hard being a teenager and a Christian. She wanted to honor God and her parents, but living a Christian life in the twenty-first century seemed like an uphill battle. Her parents didn't seem to understand, just slapped down rules. Why couldn't they just let her lead her own life? Sure, she might make some mistakes, but things would work themselves out. Besides, it wasn't like Nick was a bad guy. He was a Christian, so why did her parents have to be so restrictive?

It was their fault that she had to sneak out like this, Kara told herself. They weren't leaving her any other choice. She furrowed her brow with resolve and tiptoed to the door.

Salvation

"There's more to life than baseball," Brian said through his mouthful of Egg McMuffin. He and Matt were huddled over their breakfast in a corner of the restaurant, which was bustling with other friends and families grabbing their pre-church breakfast and coffee.

"Not my life," Matt retorted. They both laughed. Matt's name was practically synonymous with baseball. He'd been playing since age eight, and was presently the starting shortstop on his college team. When he wasn't playing, he was training. You couldn't talk to him

without being barraged by the latest news from the sports page. Matt lived for the game.

This Sunday, however, Matt's laughter only thinly veiled his unease. He'd been meeting with Brian every Sunday morning for two months now, and their conversations had probed progressively deeper. Their small talk about baseball, college, and friends had steadily yielded to Brian's favorite subject: his faith in God. Matt had always thought of himself as a Christian, so he dismissed much of this talk as being familiar turf. After all, his parents were Christians and he regularly attended church. He had a Bible and knew most of the stories. What more did Brian really have to say?

But something was different today. Matt felt a sense of awe as Brian described the significance and meaning he attached to his faith. It was no casual belief. Brian's faith defined his life. And Brian was *cool*. Matt had grown up around plenty of adult Christians, but he'd never met a Christian like Brian, someone his own age who was joyful and intelligent and had such passion and certainty about his life. Matt had come to deeply respect his friend. He wanted what Brian had. Every word Brian spoke this morning seemed to pierce his heart.

Brian was right. Matt knew he had been defining his life by the wrong things. Now, as he spoke with Brian, he sensed the light of a new dawn breaking in his heart. Brian had shown him that genuine, deep, and significant faith was within his reach. The excitement rose in his soul. He had to tell Brian what he was feeling.

Matt set aside the remains of his forgotten sandwich, leaned eagerly across the table, and started to share.

Popularity

Every girl in Jackson Community College seemed to be enamored of Eric. Every day when Tim walked into his freshman literature class, he saw a whole pack of them surrounding Eric's desk, giggling and smiling and throwing him shy looks. It was unbelievable. Less than two weeks into the school year, and Eric already had the standing of a Greek god. He was popular with the guys, too. Tim never saw him without a gaggle of worshipful, tagalong friends. Tim couldn't blame

them. Eric had it all: six-foot-three, linebacker on the football team, a charming sense of humor, and a heavily muscled body.

Tim took a seat in the back corner of the classroom and watched as Eric recounted one of his drunken escapades from Friday's party. Guys and girls alike erupted in riotous laughter. Tim sighed with envy.

Tim had always been in the popular crowd at his Christian high school, where he'd played sports, served in the student government, and led Bible studies. He'd had high expectations of celebrating his newfound freedom and new friends in college, but so far, he just felt lost in the crowd. Hardly anybody knew who he was. Tim was quickly discovering that his faith didn't earn him much popularity here because Christians were few and far between, and the popular circles mostly revolved around the party scene.

The fact was, he just wasn't enjoying his college life so far. Serious Christianity and secular college didn't seem to mix well. Maybe he should loosen up a little. He was young and still learning about himself, so why couldn't he experiment? That's what college was about, right? There would be time to get serious later. Why not enjoy himself now?

Eric cracked a crude joke, and the gathering around his desk laughed once more. Tim found himself laughing, too. Eric was funny. Tim looked around, took a deep breath, then rose to join the circle. Maybe he could learn a few things from Eric.

Can you relate to Kara, Matt, or Tim? Kara had a strong, sincere faith, but found herself increasingly ensnared in sin. Matt had always considered himself a Christian, but at the age of 19 he realized that he wasn't. Tim claimed to be a Christian, but his craving for popularity led to serious compromises when he reached college. Each had grown up in a Christian home, yet faced particular challenges and temptations. They were church kids wrestling with the desires of their hearts, trying to find their true identities.

What's a Church Kid?

Once, I spoke at a high school leadership conference where a few of the teenagers didn't like the term "church kids." To them it had the same connotations as "pastor's kids," a term often synonymous with troublemakers. Maybe you feel the same way, but when you really understand what a church kid is, I think you will see that it's an overwhelmingly positive term.

Church kids are individuals who have grown up in the church. They come from Christian homes, have Christian parents, and have attended church their entire lives. They live in a Christian culture surrounded by Christians at home, church, and often school. It is a wonderful privilege to be a church kid.

I'm a church kid myself, and I am incredibly grateful to God for the many blessings we church kids experience while growing up in Christian homes. We have been raised and trained by godly parents; we have been repeatedly told the message of the gospel; we have been taught the Word of God from a young age; we have regularly attended church where we have worshiped God and have been taught about his character; we have lots of Christian friends; and we have been protected from many of the negative influences of the world.

In July of 1971, God greatly blessed me by allowing me to be born into a strong Christian family in a small town in New Hampshire. My parents had not grown up in Christian homes, but God had saved them about six years before I was born. They faithfully raised me according to biblical principles. Our family regularly attended church, prayed together, and had times of family Bible study. My parents sent me to youth-group meetings, a Christian school, and a Christian college. I grew up a fairly typical church kid.

Just before I turned four, in July of 1975, God drew me to himself through the gentle teaching and leading of my parents. At that time I repented of my sins and professed Jesus as my personal Savior. I had a four-year-old's understanding of the gospel and, in retrospect, I think a genuine conversion. (Isn't it amazing that the gospel message is simple enough for a four year old to grasp!) I do not remember the time prior to my salvation. I practically grew up a Christian.

As I grew older, my faith steadily grew, too. God used specific trials in elementary and high school to refine my faith and teach me how to trust him. After high school, I left rural New Hampshire and headed to the suburbs of Chicago to attend Wheaton College, where God helped me begin to live out my faith and form a walk of my own. He also confirmed a call on my life to work in Christian education, and since graduating in 1993, I have worked full-time as a teacher and principal in a Christian school.

I am a church kid. I grew up surrounded by church kids, went to college with church kids, and have worked closely with church kids for the past twelve years. I have experienced and observed both the blessings and the dangers of growing up in a Christian environment, and I have a strong desire that church kids learn to praise God for the privileges they experience and to carefully navigate the dangers they face.

Blessings

Growing up in a Christian home is a wonderful privilege. We have been given so much: godly parents, training in the Word of God, friends from Christian homes, support from a Christian church community, and most importantly an opportunity to know God at a young age. Throughout our lives, we are repeatedly taught about the love of God, his plan of salvation, ways to recognize and resist sin, and living for the glory of God.

Not only are we given much, we are also protected from much. Our God-fearing and loving parents wisely limit our entertainment options—television, music, movies, books, and magazines. They carefully monitor our friendships and our exposure to the message of the world. We learn about the lies of secular values and other religions. We are trained to evaluate all of life according to the standards of Scripture.

Daily, I benefit from years of being taught the truths of Scripture and from countless hours of reading the Word. My parents have provided for me a clear example of living all of life for the glory of God, maintaining a strong marriage, and raising children. Because of faith-

ARE YOU “GROWING UP CHRISTIAN”?

If you are, you face unique temptations and dangers—but you also can experience an abundance of blessings.

“With much attention paid to converts, teens who grow up in the church sometimes feel like second-class citizens in their own home towns. This book can help them to count their blessings and pray for more.” —MARVIN OLASKY

“Karl’s love for God’s word and for young adults is evident on every page. He wants to see them transformed by Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross—not merely living off the religion of their dads and moms.”

—JOSHUA HARRIS, pastor and author of *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)*

“Provides a shot of encouragement to teens who have grown up immersed in Christianity. Engages readers to consider whether they have taken possession of that which they profess.”

—KEN SMITHERMAN, President, Association of Christian Schools International

“Karl Graustein gets it! He understands the pitfalls and dangers that track with the privilege of growing up in a Christian home. He addresses all the standard temptations: getting ensnared by sin, presuming oneself to be saved, craving for popularity. This book has a look and feel that young people will appreciate.”

—TEDD TRIPP, pastor, author of *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*

“If you’ve found yourself saying, ‘My testimony isn’t very exciting. I grew up in a Christian home,’ then this is just the thing to help you see how your Christian upbringing is an asset not a liability.”

—JEFF MYERS, Associate Professor, Bryan College

www.growingupchristian.com

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