

Pioneer Progress

Back in the 1970s, I was a fan of a weekly TV program called “Little House on the Prairie,” which depicted the life of author Laura Ingalls Wilder as a child and young woman on the American frontier. The show was schmaltzy at times, I admit, but it was also educational. And it provided a yardstick by which to measure the “progress”—if you can call it that—we had made in our country.

In the days when the show aired on prime-time television, there was a stark contrast between the lives of the characters on the program—who were early American pioneers—and the lives of the average modern American. The pioneers lived a hard life, fighting to survive in often harsh conditions.

Modern-day citizens, on the other hand, had every convenience the technological age could provide. By comparison, their lives were easy. Today they are even easier.

But there was one thing the pioneers had that many modern Americans don’t—close-knit, God-centered families. Family members worked, played and worshiped together. And most of the activities they engaged in, other than those directly related to survival, revolved around the local church.

Today there are more establishments for entertainment in our country than there are churches, and they have tended to separate families rather than bringing them together. There’s very little “family time” anymore, either working or playing, and the lack of parent-child interaction has reduced the influence parents have on their offspring. The result is a generation of headstrong kids with few boundaries, underdeveloped consciences and an increased exposure to sin.

To me, that’s not progress—and I’ll wager you agree. But what can we do about it?

Certainly, we can't change the culture overnight. But we can change it a little at a time. All we have to do is consciously impart to the children of the next generation the biblical values we espouse. Whether we have the opportunity to nurture and train our own kids or influence someone else's, we have the power to make a difference.

Mothers especially have the potential to affect the future of this nation because of their role as carriers—and transmitters—of the culture. Poet William Ross Wallace exalted this role in the 1800s when he wrote of the “divine mission” women have to “keep the young heart open / always to the breath of God.” He was perhaps the first to acknowledge that “The hand that rocks the cradle / Is the hand that rules the world.”

It will take effort to do what is required—spending time with our children, teaching them the benefit of hard work, making God and church our focal point once again. But if we are faithful to take a stand in this hedonistic age, perhaps we, like the pioneers, will make real progress—and usher in a new era of godliness in our land.