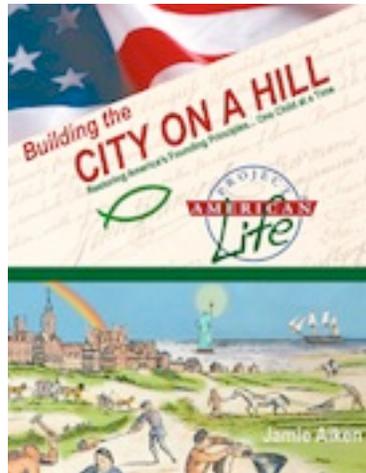


Parable Trek

"All these things are done in parables!"



One-of-a-kind Curriculum!

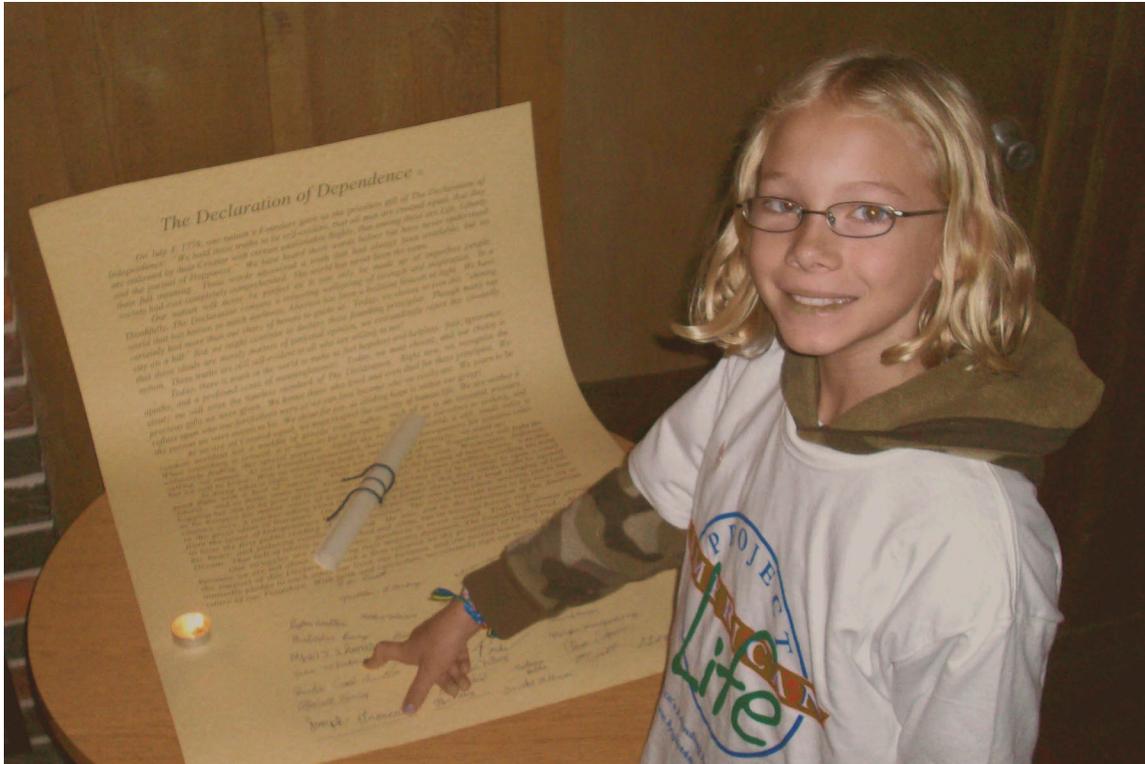


A new product of *The Refuge* (d.b.a. *Project American Life*)

"Where America's Founding Principles Come to Life"

www.projectamericanlife.com

The Refuge is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



Parable Trek is an experiential pilgrimage into the Truth and Life of the Gospels! Using one-of-a-kind activities and engaging simulations, the *Parable Trek* curriculum instills a Biblical worldview while inspiring impassioned discipleship. *Parable Trek* is an extension of *Project American Life (PAL)*... the four-day, residential adventure motivating schoolchildren in Alabama and Indiana for over 15 years.

Project American Life has prospered because it is built upon the founding principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. *Parable Trek* is not limited in its textual foundations like its counterpart *PAL* has to be. Therefore, *Parable Trek* uses the Bible as its absolute bedrock along with works of Christian thinkers from Augustine to Aquinas to Luther to Lewis. *Parable Trek* compels each participant to answer the call of Christ in their daily lives... and collectively work to build the *City on a Hill*.

Isn't this what the Church is already doing? Well... one would surely hope that all churches are attempting this, but the vital question remains: Is the current method working? The average young person today is inundated 24/7 with a secular worldview from all angles... television, movies, music, social media, books, schools, and on and on. This is quite the uphill challenge; a serious problem demands a serious response. Christian researcher, George Barna, has chronicled the prevailing reality with exhaustive precision; his findings are definitive... and most troubling. (See appendix for Barna's conclusions.)

Like seeds yet to sprout, the Gospel remains filled with limitless possibility! Christ shouts to all of us, "*If you ask, if you seek, if you knock... you will receive, you will find, to you the door will open!*" By simultaneously stimulating heart, mind, soul, and will, *Parable Trek* makes learning an exciting adventure. In *experiencing* the truth (being immersed in it!), students begin to see... to hear... to understand... forever!

Operational Structures

Parable Trek seeks to best meet the needs of participating / partnering churches. As the program is able to serve varied constituencies (youth groups, families, camps, leadership teams, college students, etc.), the possibilities are numerous, especially since *Parable Trek* serves groups aging from 10 to 110! The initial step takes place at *YMCA Hargis Retreat* in Chelsea and is led by the veteran teaching staff of *Project American Life*.

Upon experiencing the program first-hand, church leaders then have the option of providing *Parable Trek* to all interested church members at minimal costs... at their own church! Down the road, partnering churches would be able to offer the program as a ministry to other churches / groups. The dynamic and experiential nature of *Parable Trek* provides life-changing inspiration and long-lasting results far exceeding recreation-based retreats. Moreover, *Parable Trek* can be offered to any group at a fraction of the costs of conventional beach / ski trips!

Facilities: Although *YMCA Hargis Retreat* is a beautiful well-equipped camp and conference center, accommodations and activity spaces for *Parable Trek* can be quite spartan. Most importantly, facilities must be safe and functional as *Parable Trek* is a vibrant, all-engaging and non-stop adventure. If *Parable Trek* is residential, sleeping quarters can be no-frills, as they will be used exclusively for sleeping. If participants are local, they can have the option of returning home at the end of each program day. Meals can be simple fare or they can be catered for even greater convenience.

Staffing: "Teachers" are well-trained facilitators who lead small groups as well as direct participants in all large group activities, including meal times. Teacher / student ratios of 1 to 8 are ideal. "Chaperones" are responsible people who supervise overnight as well as bathroom breaks. Clearly, "chaperones" need no particular training.

Costs: The costs associated with *Parable Trek* are the proverbial "drop in the bucket" compared to conventional retreat experiences that involve travel costs to the beach, mountains, theme park, etc. Even the cost of the first *Parable Trek* experience led by professional educators at *Hargis Retreat* is minimal: \$195 covers everything (program, lodging, meals, and supplies) during the 3-day adventure. Upon experiencing the results of *Parable Trek*, churches can choose from a menu of options for further use at their own facility. For instance, does the church desire outside expertise in operating the program? Or, does the church desire pedagogical training such that the church is able to run the program, using its own members for leadership and teaching staff? The owner of the *Parable Trek* trademarks is open to many different approaches in the pursuit of best accomplishing the mission. The need throughout the Church and the larger culture is "self-evident." "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*" (Luke 12:32) *Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.*" (Mark 4:11)

Parable Trek Schedule

Day One ~ Who Am I? (Clarity)

- 5:30 Opening Gathering / The Caste System
- 6:00 The Clarifying Meal
- 7:00 Royal Games of Privilege
- 7:30 Standard Procedure
- 8:15 In Search of a Better Idea
- 8:45 Independence Hall
- 9:30 Snack Social / Quiet Sing
- 10:00 Discovery I / Journaling / Devotionals

Day Two ~ What Am I? (Compassion and Courage)

- 8:00 Morning Remembrance
- 8:15 Breakfast
- 9:00 Laws of Nature
- 10:00 Humans Being
- 11:00 Mind Music
- 12:00 Profiles in Courage
- 12:15 Courageous Dining
- 1:15 Directed Journaling
- 2:00 Citizenship Rules
- 3:30 Riddle of the Ages
- 4:30 Hold These Truths
- 6:00 The Compassion Meal
- 7:00 Quest
- 8:00 Night Light
- 9:30 Snack Social / Quiet Sing
- 10:00 Discovery II / Journaling / Devotionals

Day Three ~ Why Am I? (Commitment)

- 8:00 Morning Remembrance
- 8:15 Breakfast
- 9:00 Discovery III / Closing Steps / Worship Prep
- 11:00 Worship
- 12:15 Lunch / Photos / Departure

All activities follow the structural methodologies depicted in *Project American Life's* textbook: *Building the City on a Hill*. All closing facilitations are unique to *Parable Trek*.

"The Core Four"

"The Core Four" virtues and parallel questions provide a roadmap for examining life... its meaning and its purpose. *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10) Christ gives each of us the blessed opportunity to seize the highest aspirations of life... to be the salt of the earth... a light to the world... the city on a hill! Here, Christ's model prayer echoes, *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Clearly, the bar could not possibly be set higher; this is the path of discipleship!

1.) Clarity (Who am I?): *Parable Trek's* mental bootcamp tests assumptions. Rigorous thinking reveals vital answers. "Upon what foundation am I standing?" **The Mind is Engaged!** As Christians, we believe that a Sovereign God created each person for the most beautiful reasons. If we are important to Almighty God, we have inherent worth and an eternal meaning for our existence. Thus, we have a calling at hand: What does God desire from us? *Parable Trek* illumines the absolute standards that are our hope, our strength, and our purpose for living. There is the *"Aha Moment:"* Morality and meaning are not abstract propositions, but rather Divine Absolutes! In searching for significance, there is a clarifying voice: The Creator of the Universe loves us!

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house." (Matthew 5:14-15)

"...and you shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32)

2.) Compassion (What am I?): Simulations develop empathy and gratitude. The unique nature of humanity is examined. "Do I have a duty to use my gifts wisely?" **The Heart is Engaged!** The life of Jesus Christ is the ultimate story of compassion... God's love for a broken world... God's willingness to suffer for us! In stark contrast, self-satisfaction is the primary pursuit among today's youth. Consequently, apathy now reigns instead of empathy. Due to a lack of moral instruction and consideration of big-picture questions, people are increasingly unable to look beyond themselves. Such a path leads ultimately to the abolition of love. *Parable Trek* inspires students to reach beyond the smallness of self towards the pursuit of life's greatest Gift... to seize the wondrous opportunity to serve the cause of Christ! To fulfill such a mission, what must one become?

"What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than God, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands, and have put all things under his feet." (Psalms 8:4-6)

"As you do it to the least of these, you do it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

3.) Courage (Where am I?): Historical models of valor are experienced. Traditional virtues are considered. "What kind of person will I choose to be?" **The Soul is Engaged!** Here is the substance that has been required of past patriots and saints. Courage, the quality of mind and spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger or pain with firmness and bravery, is largely missing today... even among members of our churches. Perhaps this may be a better way of saying it: Courage is missing in society because it is missing in the Church! The most essential questions of life are never even considered when one lives a "me" focused existence.

The hard facts of history are indisputable regarding the prerequisites for establishing and preserving Liberty. In each time of testing, courage has been the resounding instrument of moral progress. C.S. Lewis described the equation in most straightforward fashion: "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point." Though clearly waning in these postmodern times, *Parable Trek* helps participants rediscover core courage! Consider how the same disciples that scattered from the Garden of Gethsemane were transformed into models of bravery... followers of Christ!

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

"I have told you this so that through me you may have peace. In the world you'll have trouble, but be courageous... I've overcome the world!" (John 16:33)

4.) Commitment (Why am I?): Philosophy is integrated with concrete action. Lives of meaning and purpose become goals. "Will I stand upon our founding principles?" **The Will is Engaged!** The act of committing (the fortitude to follow through) is not only a matter of individual morality, but also a vital trait of the citizenry. As always, the value of something is known by how hard and how long people will fight for it. Though the hunger for life's essentials is sadly missing today, *Parable Trek* can generate passion for the things for which we *ought* to care! Yes, good news abides: As we choose to follow Christ, we find direction in every pursuit... even quests of the highest realm!

When we are able to love, commitment is a blessing rather than a burden. *"If you love me, feed my sheep."* (John 21:15) Although Jesus has shown us the face of commitment so vividly, it can still be a most difficult matter. However, the Church is called to share in Christ's passion... to sacrifice for His Cause... to answer His call. How can we best serve Him... even be a co-worker in the building of the Kingdom of God?

The Author of the Universe has all the answers! One need only dare to ask the questions. Herein, is the pedagogy of *Parable Trek*. Herein, is our hope and God's Eternal Promise!

"But whoever will persevere until the end will have life." (Matthew 24:13)

"I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:20)

Closing Thoughts

Clarity, compassion, courage and commitment are within our grasp... because God has given us the tools to seize them! Incredibly, we have even been Created in His image! Rejoice, we are not alone in "the good fight!"

Christ commands, *"And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength."* (Mark 12:30) One need only consider the tools we must use in order to answer Christ's call to love: Clarity in our minds... Compassion in our hearts... Courage in our souls... and Commitment in our will. From all of these vantage points, participants begin to answer the foundational questions: Who am I? What am I? Where am I? Why am I? Why have such core questions become so painfully difficult? Perhaps we are so governed by who the world tells us we are that we have lost sight of the only perspective that matters: God's. Even so, Good News remains: *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."* (John 1:5)

Great literature poses profound questions, but sadly, such rhetorical masterpieces have miniscule value in capturing the ear of today's young people. How does one provide a banquet for someone who is not hungry? How then does one inspire the prerequisite hunger? The adage, *"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink,"* contains definitive truth. However, this should beg the question: Why would a horse not be interested in the substance that it needs? After all, water is "self-evident" to a horse.

Then again, people are not horses. America's Founders believed that there were truths that ought to be "self-evident" to human beings. Herein is the conundrum regarding the nature of truth. If *"all men are Created equal"* were simply obvious, there would be no need to write it down... or fight a bloody war to enshrine it. Moreover, the history of humanity has always been replete with grisly images of man's inability to live according to such truths. So, what can "self-evident" possibly mean? The Founders believed that these truths would be recognized by all seriously thinking persons who genuinely focused their attention upon the matter. Just as with the articles of faith, a mathematical proof is not available, and yet, we can "know" the truth... as if it were etched into our very bones.

"Self-evident truths" are not restricted to a culture or time; they are true for all people at all times. Consider man's hunger for God. Is it rational to think that we are longing for something that simply does not exist? After all, when we are sleepy, it is because sleeping exists. When we are hungry, it is because food exists. So, how do we discover the essential truths that are not corporeal? As always, Jesus provides the way: *"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."* (Matthew 7:7-8)

Here, the *Parable Trek* journey begins! ***Soli Deo Gloria!***

Appendix: Excerpts from recent George Barna essays

"As I consider the data regarding the perceptions, values, behavior, and dreams of Americans, especially younger Americans, it seems clear that while we love the remaining freedoms and benefits of living in the United States, many citizens lack a real relationship with this nation and thus rebel against its rules and traditions. We are eager to take advantage of what's available but are substantially less willing to sacrifice and invest for the good of the nation.

Think about the education our children receive these days. Gone are stalwart classes such as Civics or practices such as saying the pledge of allegiance or singing the national anthem. Perhaps in your area many community organizations that fostered a pro-country attitude or worldview have receded or closed down. Turn on the television or radio and you may encounter a mainstream media that seems more intent on challenging America's foundations and heart than helping to build a sense of national spirit. I wonder how much longer the United States can withstand such a deficit of investment in upholding the foundations of our country, and thinking about the meaning of and commitment to the common good. And it is concerning that the two youngest generations of Americans seem to view society's rules as barriers to overcome rather than legacies of love and wisdom.

As supporters and beneficiaries of those standards and historic commitments, I believe that America's Christians have a special role to play in defending, conveying, and strengthening the foundations of our country. Am I the only one who worries about our fading sense of loyalty to and connection with our republic? Do you sense that we have a problem regarding our individual relationships with the United States? How well do you think we, as Christians, are adequately protecting, explicating, and restoring the foundations of the U.S.? What else could we do? What have you done that you are proud of in this regard?

A final observation has to do with another group that is reflecting declining depth of commitment: born again Christians. As the number of born again adults has increased (from 35% in 1991 to 41% today), the engagement in the Christian life seems to have waned – a common problem when a product, service, movement, or perspective gains massive numbers and velocity. Note that during the last two decades several critical reflections of spiritual devotion, such as church attendance and Bible reading, have dropped among the born again constituency. In the past decade, even the proportion of born again adults who say their faith is vitally important to them has dipped substantially.

What should we make of this growing complacency among the born again group? I attribute it to a central finding in the Maximum Faith research showing that many ask for God's forgiveness but few are willing to suffer and sacrifice in order to be broken of sin and move on to a life of surrender and submission that produces a deeper relationship with God and a genuine love for other people. Bonhoeffer's description of such a spiritual condition, the pursuit of cheap grace, fits America all too snugly today." -George Barna

Detailed research data is available from the Barna Group: www.georgebarna.com

A sampling of testimonials regarding the PAL experience follows:

"Where America's Founding Principles Come to Life"



"Thanks for sharing all of life's secrets with us and for showing us how to reach from the valley to the mountaintop and showing us how to become all we can be. I would also like to thank you for pointing us in the right direction and for showing us how to reach our goals. It's a long journey, and we don't know what awaits us. That is something you can't teach us. We have to find out on our own but once we get there, we will know what to do. You've inspired deeply. I wish I could pay you back but remember, once Judgment Day comes, you shall have your eternal reward. May God be with you because it is "In God We Trust." Sincerely, - Robert, 5th Grade

"Of all the things I do for my classes -- both in school and out - in the two years I have them, Project American Life is by far the most important. It plants "seeds" - and presents alternatives -- that my kids can always fall back on as they get older. This is the most valuable experience that can be provided to middle school students." - Major Gary R. Leopold, Teacher, Academy for Arts and Academics

"This interactive program rates a 10+... it does more to bring young people and adults to a resolve about the standards by which they will choose to live their lives than any other program I've ever witnessed." - Penny Shell, Teacher, Whitesburg Middle

"Every child in the state would benefit by coming to PAL. I evaluate PAL over and above the highest standard of measurement. This entire experience was awesome – unbelievable program!" - Jonathan Snodgrass, Teacher, Academy for Science and Foreign Language

"I believe PAL is a wonderful program. It should be mandatory for all 6th graders. It is the best field trip experience ever! Period." - John Batte, Parent

"Someday, down the road of life, a student will make a decision, an important decision, that was "seeded" by Project American Life. Please, Please, PLEASE continue this program in some way, shape, or form!" - Benjamin Hicks, Teacher, Williams Tech

"Once again, I come back to school absolutely refreshed and revitalized! I am constantly in awe of this wonderful curriculum and its effects on our students. Our kids will appreciate the life they have and the gifts and blessings they have been given." - David Merzbacher, Teacher, Eastwood Middle

"Project American Life is the one experience that I truly feel every child in America should experience. I will hold most special the real life simulations - they are awesome!" - Shirley Jones, Teacher, Highlands Elementary

"It was the most amazing experience I've had in recent memory. The program is so compelling in nature that it is almost impossible to describe. As one student said at the end of camp, 'I certainly got my money's worth.' I will hold most special watching the change in the children from a "me" orientation to a "we" orientation." - Ford William, Parent

"I believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience this program. Each year I watch my students change into compassionate, thoughtful human beings who seek answers to life's difficult questions and make an effort to take responsibility for themselves and others. Once again, thank you all for an amazing adventure. I most value the reminder of who I am and what I stand for. As adults, we tend to get caught up in life and forget to actually live. True living means so much more than simply going off to work, eating, sleeping, etc. Project American Life is a much-needed reminder for me personally. I walk away feeling blessed and recharged." - Jayme Mothershed, Teacher, Mt. Gap Middle

"Thank you, and please continue in this great work. How refreshing to know that such a program exists: one that so effectively reaches kids before they've had a chance to make too many bad choices, and one that inspires young people to make a positive difference in their world." - Eddie Sturgis, Parent

"Project American Life is an incredible program that captures the children's imaginations and attention immediately. The children did / played programs / activities that made them learn and actually think about what they were learning. They have been made aware of concepts that they really hadn't thought of before. They played games that helped them truly understand ideas and concepts in a way that they will remember and truly understand."
- Shag Syed, Parent

"Project American Life is a program ahead of its time and yet long overdue. Two thoughts will remain with me: My students have been told and shown in various ways that each is special and has a purpose. As a teacher, the setting and the curriculum have reminded me of my rights to teach the truth."
- Sandra Montgomery, Teacher, Academy for Science and Foreign Language

"The students' impassioned search led them to a document that they had heard of... but never really known. I saw the tears rolling down their faces (through my own tears) during the vivid ceremonies built around The Declaration of Independence. Like the students, I will always remember the beauty of these moments. I soon began realizing where all of the programming was heading: we were going to EXPERIENCE American history and the principles therein! Through dozens of such simulations, students played games and solved problems that led them to answer questions they had never even considered before. At the end of the program, I witnessed profound changes in their thinking... their acting... they seemed to even stand up straighter. In fact, my own appreciation for America grew... I began to see with new eyes the blessed visions of our Founding Fathers. I want to thank you for what you have given to these children... as well as to me!" - Mary Leigh, Parent

"All of the experiences at Project American Life were good because it wasn't superficial. IT WAS REAL! You didn't teach us facts for a test, but facts for LIFE. We need to have a motivation. We need to know how fortunate we really are. This experience will last us all our lives. It refreshed our souls, or that's what it felt like. I feel new." - Natalie, 6th Grade

"Before I came to Project American Life, I thought I was nothing. Now I know that I am somebody special and that I live in a great country." - Austin, 6th Grade

For a host of quotes and media reports: www.projectamericanlife.com/Media.html