The greatest gift parents can give their daughter is the knowledge that she is uniquely made and unconditionally loved by God. When a girl knows that the Creator of the universe cares deeply about her problems, hopes, and challenges, she learns that her self-worth is rooted in things far greater than what the world tells her. She realizes she is special, cared for, and eternally valued; that she is a child of God. It will give her an inner power like no other.

When I was growing up as a shy, middle-class girl in Rye, New York, my parents took me to church regularly. It was just what you did in those days. My parents weren’t religious zealots. Nor were they particularly vocal about their Christian beliefs. But they believed the church offered moral direction and wholesome friendships. They thought of church as a place where I could learn the virtues and values contained in the Bible. They were right, and I’m glad they brought me.

As a young girl sitting in the church pews, I didn’t understand the connection between faith and freedom. I’m not sure my parents did either. But as I grew and studied history, I discovered one of the core
principles of conservatism: religious faith and human freedom are inextricably linked.

Have you ever wondered why totalitarian and tyrannical governments impose atheism on their people? The reason is that people who believe in God believe in an eternal afterlife—and people who believe in an eternal afterlife are dangerous. They are bold, courageous, and not afraid to sacrifice themselves for causes bigger than themselves. People of faith believe that their self-worth comes from God, not government. No dictator can tolerate people with that kind of confidence and conviction. It threatens their control and power. As history has shown, tyrannical governments have tortured, beaten, imprisoned, executed, and annihilated people of faith in an attempt to crush freedom movements and enforce atheism.

Governmental hostility to faith doesn’t always involve sanctioned atheism or killing. Modern socialism, for example, fosters government dependency. In the United States, government dependency teaches girls that their self-worth comes from food stamps, abortion clinics, and their secular education. The Left’s message to our daughters is that minimum wage, lousy health care, public housing, and a little walking-around cash assistance is the best they can hope for. Worse, it teaches that government is their higher power and politics is a stand-in for religion. Our daughters deserve so much better!

It’s true that people often need a hand up for legitimate reasons, and they deserve compassion and support. Any one of us could be in that position one day. But consigning a girl’s initiative and her self-worth to a lifetime of government programs is soul-crushing. It will never deliver happiness and prosperity. It will never unleash your daughter’s potential. It will never be enough to fill the human void. Uncle Sam is not a worthy substitute for a good father and graceful mother, much less God.

The growth of government, along with a politicized education system, has eroded old taboos. There are plenty of studies showing how women can receive the equivalent of a middle-class income in public benefits if they get pregnant, have kids, and don’t marry.¹ The message to our girls: rely on government, not God. It’s a soulless trap. “Free” will
always be tempting, and it creates incentives for girls to make harmful decisions. As parents we need to guard our children and provide for them, otherwise government and society will. How do parents do this? By instilling that self-worth flows from God, not government.

What Is Self-Worth?

Put simply, self-worth is a deep understanding of one’s value as a human being. It’s your inner sense of importance. It can be positive or negative, and it varies by degree. But there’s no greater source of self-worth than God.

The great conservative thinker and author William F. Buckley once said that it is hard for a person who does not believe in God to be a conservative. It’s not impossible, of course, but Buckley’s insight confirms what I’ve seen in the lives of many, many girls. I’ve had the pleasure to work with thousands of young women over the years and have seen how their faith sustains them. Belief in God gives them a sense of purpose. Faith is foundational to freedom. Without faith, girls often fall victim to what the government, their peers, and pop culture say they are worth.

Self-worth is a deeply conservative concept that places the value of the individual outside of the reach of cultural forces and government. But Leftists have tried to undermine the robust conception of self-worth by replacing it with self-esteem.

While self-worth establishes freedom by liberating the individual from the vicissitudes of the moment, self-esteem chains people to the pathologies of their time. Self-esteem makes fragile people who look to others for validation. According to the Left, self-esteem is the most important thing for children. Self-esteem can certainly be positive, but praising children for fear of hurting their feelings is a poor substitute for nurturing their true, innate value as children of a loving God.

The “participation-trophy” approach that permeates schools creates a fragile confidence that has no true foundation. Self-worth, on the other hand, puts people in touch with something much bigger and more
important. You don’t need validation or approval from others when you know you are unconditionally loved by a holy God.

Government can’t build self-worth. Why? Because governments are made of people, and people are fallible. The best government can do is reflect the people that run it. Leaving morality and ethics up to government is a losing proposition from the start because you are relying on people as opposed to God. Ask yourself: Do you really want to outsource your daughter’s moral code to politicians and bureaucrats?

Think about some of the things governments have done, like condoning slavery and the Dred Scott decision. Think about the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on abortion and how it has led to the destruction of 60 million innocent babies’ lives. Government and popular culture think that’s just fine, and they even celebrate it. The German government once systematically annihilated 6 million Jews and anyone who didn’t agree with its horrific ideology. Communist and totalitarian governments have killed an estimated 100 million people. The atrocities at the hands of tyrannical governments are commonplace.

Religion frees people from the moral judgments of their day. It gives them the moral authority to assess whether their society has been led astray. Of course, you do not have to be religious to understand that you are uniquely created and that you have a higher purpose. But it sure helps.

Take Your Daughters to Church

If you want your daughter to understand her self-worth, she has to know its source. Since self-worth flows from something larger than oneself, why not expose her to the greatest knowable source of love and purpose imaginable? It’s not school, celebrity, or Instagram. The answer is God. And faith is nurtured in houses of worship.

You don’t have to be the most devout person to experience the benefits of worship. Spiritual development can be a huge addition to your girl’s life. At a minimum, where would you rather have your daughter meet friends or, dare we say, a boy? Where better to find affirmation
against the type of peer pressure that too often leads to destructive teen-
age behavior?

Churches and synagogues teach girls to appreciate that there is more out there than worldly desires. Girls can find healthy role models and forge thoughtful friendships with other families. They need faithful mentors and friends they can rely on, in addition to learning about their higher calling. All of that is built into the fabric of faith communities.

There’s an old joke that if children don’t go to church, then they can’t rebel against their faith when they go to college. Like all good humor, there’s some truth to it. The key, however, is to plant the seeds when they’re young. *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it* (Proverbs 22:6).

I’ve listened to many young women offer their thoughts about faith and belief. Often, their parents would take them to church when they were girls, then they would stop going when they were older. But at some point, they found their way back to faith. You learn it. You leave it. You come back to it. That’s the path many take when it comes to faith.

But it begins at home. What could be more wonderful than your daughter’s knowing deep in her heart that she’s uniquely created and that God has a purpose and a plan for her that involves hope and prosperity, not harm? Children need to be immersed in a community of faith to understand that, and if you plant the seeds when they are young, they are more likely to take root and provide a foundation for true self-worth. It isn’t just about attending weekly church or synagogue services. It’s saying grace at meals. It’s celebrating baptisms, communions, ordinations, and other religious observations.

Government can never replace God. Flawed human beings are no substitute for a loving relationship with our Creator. Take your daughter to church. Encourage her spiritual growth. Sometimes a loving nudge from a parent or grandparent is all it takes to bestow the blessings of faith. Never underestimate your influence when daughters are young or when they are older and have their own families.
How to Raise a Conservative Daughter

Don’t Give Your Daughter a Participation Trophy; Give Her the Truth

There’s a fallacy that adults constantly need to inflate a child’s self-esteem or else the child is at risk of veering off course. This impulse may be well-intended, but it’s misguided. Children, especially girls, are much tougher and more durable than what government and modern “helicopter parents” realize. The problem is most apparent in public schools, where every student gets a proverbial trophy, and there are no losers. Tag and dodgeball are out; subjective grading is in. Competition is viewed as evil, masculine, and rooted in capitalism. Failing is all but forbidden for fear of hurt feelings. Everyone’s a winner, the liberal logic goes, even though we all know that’s not the truth.

What is this teaching our girls? I would argue that it’s actually ensuring failure. Girls who are not allowed to fail become ill-equipped to deal with adversity. Losing and mistakes are a part of life. Overcoming obstacles through hard work and perseverance builds character and authentic self-worth and confidence, rather than a cheapened self-esteem “sugar high.”

When girls are conditioned to believe that everything they do is a success, it sets them up to struggle later in life. Trouble keeping up in college? Time for an “emotional support animal” and a “safe space.” Feelings get hurt? Run to the nearest “crying circle.” Experiencing professional and financial hardships at the outset of a career? Obviously it’s sexism that only government can fix.

One doesn’t need to jump to extreme conclusions to realize the harm of universal trophy culture. It’s so important for parents to be honest with their daughters. My sister understands this concept well. She taught children in Cape Cod schools for many years, and the teachers were instructed to tell each child how awesome they were several times a day. “But they weren’t awesome,” she once confided in me. “Certainly not as often as we were supposed to tell them.”

So, what did she do? She told the truth. When the children deserved praise, she said so. When they didn’t, she respected them enough not to
mislead them. Eventually, unearned praise becomes meaningless when children hear it so much. Kids are smart; they know when adulation is deserved and when it’s puffery. The solution is selective, loving reinforcement based on reality, not phony emotional manipulation. It builds true confidence and self-worth.

Loving reinforcement doesn’t mean shredding an eight-year-old’s painting or poem as if you’re the culture critic at the New York Times. It means finding something that you like and reinforcing it. “This is a great color here,” or, “I like this phrase you used, but here’s what I would do to make it even better.” You’re neither falsely praising nor abusing her vulnerability; you’re being honest and helping your daughter grow.

Teach Modesty

Teach your daughter modesty. It may not always be cool, but it’s absolutely a virtue—and that goes for boys and girls. Immodest choices invite all manner of headaches and heartaches, and you don’t have to be an easily offended prude to know it. We’ve all seen examples of young women making poor choices in real life and online, and it’s never been easier to make a damaging misstep. The internet is forever, as they say.

Talk to your daughter about the internet and advise her never to put anything online that she wouldn’t be proud to have her mother, grandmother, or a future employer see. The same goes for off-line activities. Conservative girls should have a developed sense of propriety, which is largely absent from popular culture today. In a world attempting to redefine prostitution as “sex work” and in which pornography has never been more accessible or less taboo, your daughter won’t get this message from her peers. Instead, she’ll face a good deal of toxic messaging telling her the opposite.

Parents sometimes struggle to find attire that is both appropriate and fashionable, but it’s out there. Far more than just clothes, the way a girl presents herself to the world is a signal of how she views herself. At the Clare Boothe Luce Center, we work with our college interns to help them consider
how their attire reflects the seriousness and professionalism they wish to project in the workplace. We sometimes give our young women leaders help shopping for attractive, professional dresses. Teaching your daughter that modesty is a virtue will help protect and bolster her confidence. Our girls are worth so much more than the lies society tells them. They should never disregard their bodies. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own* (1 Corinthians 6:19). Nor should they discount their privacy or uniqueness in the eyes of God. Modesty helps a girl see that her worth is inward, not based on outward appearances.

“Princess Culture” Creates Toads

Well-meaning parents can make the mistake of raising little “princesses” rather than strong, graceful girls. Inculcating faith and a religious outlook in your daughter can help fight against this. Princesses are lovely and darling, but raising a conservative daughter also involves hard work and service. Parents should want their daughters to have ample opportunities and better lives than they had, if possible. But “pedestal parenting” undermines a girl’s independence and creates entitlement, which happens to be defining traits of liberalism and government dependency. Free stuff and princess-like adoration might sound nice. It might even feel good to the giver. But it can breed a sense of complacency and entitlement.

Daughters must develop a grateful and appreciative spirit if they don’t want to become spoiled brats. This spirit is nurtured and cultivated by faith in God. Faith teaches girls to be thankful for what they have and to work if they want more.

Service is another cornerstone of conservatism, embedded in every major faith—and for good reason. Helping others—especially people in need—eases pain, provides opportunities, and touches lives. It’s the right thing to do. But the greatest part about serving others might be how it makes the server feel about herself. Service teaches young women to appreciate what they have and shows them the effect their good deeds can have on
others. If you want your daughter to value her worth, sign her up for a
service opportunity and let her see what the real world looks like. Appropriate
exposure to the outside world will provide context for her blessings. Not
every kid grows up in a suburban home with an iPad, air conditioning, and
a car. There are poor kids and sick people in every city and town in this
country. Service opportunities are limitless, and blessings begin to sink in
when girls are appropriately exposed to people who are less fortunate. So,
let the “princess” out of the castle. When she sees the real-world hardships
others face, she will grow in her appreciation for God’s provision and care.

Respecting Elders—Yes, That Means Parents, Too

Teaching your daughter to look towards God will also teach her to
respect authority. Honoring your parents, after all, is one of God’s com-
mandments. A girl’s inner life is rich when she expresses a basic courtesy
to others and when she is kind to others. It’s also apparent when she
demonstrates respect for her elders.

Respect is taught at home. Children learn how to properly relate to
authority figures through their relations with their family members and
through their faith. When I was raising my own children, my mother
was sick for ten years before passing and needed a lot of help every day.
The meaningful hours spent helping her taught my children the impor-
tance of serving the people they love. Serving their grandmother taught
my children that they had obligations that came before themselves. And
while they sometimes would have preferred to spend time with their
friends, to this day they treasure the bond they formed with their grand-
mother through serving her.

Respecting others comes first and foremost from respecting your
parents and submitting to God. Today, instilling these primary forms of
respect for authority is all the more important given our cultural climate.
Parents used to exhort their children to respect their teacher, without
hesitation. Even if you didn’t learn to respect your parents or have faith,
you could learn the importance of respect for authority at school.
Parents who want to raise conservative daughters today can’t be so trusting. There are left-wing and deviant agendas in education, in both public and private schools. And because the values girls will learn at school may conflict with the values they learn from their parents and from their church, it’s essential that young girls be taught whom to respect at home.

The benefits of teaching your daughter to respect her elders last a lifetime. Older adults have life lessons and experiences to share that will not only impact impressionable minds but instill humility and expand horizons. War veterans, Cuban and Vietnamese refugees, Holocaust survivors, civil rights–era Americans, and even the elderly woman next door can help your daughter appreciate the world in a different way. Their contributions and their humanity deserve respect. Some parents ask me whether they should require their daughter to say “yes ma’am” or “yes sir.” That’s a personal decision often driven by the standard where one lives (in the South the answer is a resounding yes). But thinking about a daughter’s tone and language is a good starting point for instilling respect for one’s elders.

What if a girl’s parents are themselves lacking? Well, bad parents deserve respect too. However, that does not mean daughters have to honor a parent’s poor choices. If a father is absent or abusive, then there’s absolutely no duty to respect his behavior. Instead, a girl will need an alternate role model. Churches and synagogues are ideal places for girls to find healthy mentors, as many contain married women with successful marriages and careers. When a meaningful relationship is forged with an older woman, it will further foster a girl’s respect for her elders.

“Courage Is the Ladder on Which All the Other Virtues Mount”

There will be times when preserving your daughter’s self-worth will require her to stand up and fight. She should be encouraged to do so with grace. Conservative girls are not docile, doe-eyed shrinking violets who
avoid conflict because they have been taught to turn the other cheek. Nor are they doormats. On the contrary, faith instills a self-worth that strengthens a girl’s ability to raise her hand in class and challenge a teacher who’s preaching a destructive ideology. There are ways girls can politely point out a teacher’s bias. For example, if a teacher is singing the praises of a socialist economist on an issue, she can ask her teacher, “Can you share Nobel Prize–winning economist Milton Freidman’s view on that?” Or if a feminist teacher is railing on about how a woman has a right to control her body and have an abortion if she wants, she can ask, “Does science tell us that her baby is part of her body or a separate human being?” Faith also helps girls stand up to boys and peer pressure. It gives them courage.

God means for us to be strong in our beliefs. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). When you come from a place of faith, you are standing up for a righteous cause. You are fighting the good fight, and you’re doing something moral. Teach your daughter to have graceful power and that it’s possible to have elegance, decorum, and a strong willingness to fight. People of faith believe that we should follow the laws of government until they interfere with God’s law. Then, we stand up and speak out.

Girls are often socialized to get along. But when a college professor tells lies or when other students prevent conservative girls from bringing a pro-life speaker to campus, your daughter should know she can and should speak up and be brave. Work with your daughter to give her the tools she needs (more on this later) to be a confident communicator. At the Clare Boothe Luce Center for Conservative Women, we help young conservative women learn how to speak up and fight smart. We teach girls about important policy issues and arm them with key facts to make strong arguments.

That said, you can teach and train until the cows come home, but all of it hinges on courage. Clare Boothe Luce once said, “Courage is the ladder on which all the other virtues mount.” Wise words. Luce was saying that you can know everything, you can be the greatest, smartest
person in the world, but you have to develop the courage to speak up at the right time and in the right way to oppose people who would diminish you, your family, and your beliefs. And you have to do it gracefully.

Some girls develop courage to speak up and promote conservative ideas very young—in high school or earlier. I was a senior in college before I was brave enough to start a conservative club. It took me a year of living in socialist England (before Margaret Thatcher) in a junior-year exchange program to develop an intense passion for promoting freedom and begin my life’s work as a conservative leader.

Luce was graceful and courageous. She had to be. She was the only nationally recognized conservative woman during the first half of the twentieth century other than Margaret Chase Smith. Luce spoke up when no one else would, and she paved the way for other women to follow in her footsteps. She gave speeches. She spoke on the radio. She was an author. She appeared on television when few women, much less conservative women, had the opportunity. Luce had tremendous courage, motivated by her belief in God and her upbringing. Not all of us are called to such a public life, but every girl can develop the courage to defend herself and her conservative beliefs.

If your daughter knows her self-worth flows from God, then she will have the courage to know her voice matters. She’ll understand that there’s something inside her that’s of value and worth defending.

Teach Redemption, because We All Make Mistakes

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound…” Those words come from a 250-year-old hymn that was written by John Newton, a former slave trader. As his ship was battered and cast about, nearly sinking during a terrible storm, Newton knelt and prayed. He was sailing human cargo from Africa to the Americas when the storm hit. Amid the crashing waves and the Atlantic abyss below, Newton was moved to return the slaves to their homeland. He later sailed home and became a preacher. Then a hymn writer. The blessed song “Amazing Grace” is his story.
“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” One thing that has always stuck with me is that Newton’s mother had taken him to church as a child. Saying he strayed from faith would be an understatement. He lived an awful life. But he came back to God, and his testimony of repentance has inspired millions of people over two and a half centuries. So, what is grace? It’s the idea that no matter what you’ve done, you can have a new beginning. What a wonderful and sustaining truth to instill in a young girl’s heart.

We all make mistakes. Your daughter will be no different. But if she believes in something bigger than herself, if she has faith, she can always turn the ship around and begin anew. Government cannot restore wounded souls. In the hymn, Newton says, “I once was lost, but now am found,/ Was blind, but now I see.” God’s forgiveness gives us another chance. Government can’t. That’s so important for young women to know.

Some young women are angels, but most aren’t. I was pretty darn good, but I know I wasn’t an angel. If forgiveness and redemption are in your daughter’s heart, she can better cope with life’s ups and downs. Even when she veers off course—and who among us hasn’t—she will know she can turn back and be redeemed. That’s grace. And if conservative daughters are to be graceful, then they must know how to receive it.

Faith in Motion

Self-worth is the deep sense of value we have about ourselves. It needs to be nurtured. We have to get in there and fight.

America was built on rules, laws, and morals. They didn’t just come from out of the blue. They came from our Judeo-Christian heritage. Most conservatives accept this. Most Americans do too. But these ideas are under attack, and they get twisted by academia, popular culture, and politicians.

Don’t let these forces raise your daughter. Take her to church or synagogue. Celebrate meaningful religious ceremonies. Pray together—over meals, trips, tests, decisions, and each other. Talk to her about
government and faith. Spend time with family and friends who have faith and understand the limits of government and society. Teach your girl to be courageous. To stand up when her values are under attack. If your daughter never hears about faith, and she never sees anything other than what’s in the culture—which often degrades people of faith—she will be adrift when life’s hardships come crashing in. When she knows she is wonderfully made, she will know that her self-worth flows from God, not government.