

Conversing with Kelsey Reed †

Transcript of Podcast Episode 338

Julie Walker: Hello and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, this is a bit of a special podcast in a few ways. Number one, Julie Walker is not here, and I am joined by my good friend, coworker Evan Smith,

Evan Smith: Hello again!

Andrew Pudewa: who is a key person in our Schools Division. And Evan and I have a very special guest, Kelsey Reed, from *WORLD Magazine*. And I have been a reader of *WORLD Magazine*, gosh, for well over twenty years. I’ve never let my subscription lag.

I have loved everything, almost everything they’ve done over these decades. And it’s particularly exciting to invite Kelsey because she works with families and children. And why don’t you tell us, Kelsey, a little bit about your role at *WORLD* and what value you offer for families.

Kelsey Reed: Well first, thank you for having me this morning. It is so great to be able to converse with you after listening to you a few times now and enjoying the material you are covering. It equips me for my position. So thank you. And my role at *WORLD* is actually specifically related to our God’s *WORLD* News branch.

We go through a rebranding process about every five to seven years to see how we can serve families and their children specifically better in the GWN branch. And across the board, from parents to educators, administrators, grandparents, anyone mentoring children that we spoke to in this process, identified the need for a resource within GWN that could come alongside of them to equip them to engage our cultural season right now.

There’ve been so many changes with technology. Social media tends to propel cultural change, it feels like right now. And it’s just rapid. “It’s a fire hose,” many people were saying. I’m trying to help just to slow down the pace a little bit and to give categories and tools for how do we engage the season that we’re in as families.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I love that. I wonder if *season* is the right metaphor because it seems like we’ve moved more into a “brave new world” that none of us have navigated. Things happening today would have been literally inconceivable by almost all parents ten years ago. And the speed of change is so shocking.

And I believe that a lot of parents are kind of blindsided. They ... things come up in their kids' schools, in their lives, like on the social media. And it's hard for parents to even wrap their brain around how that could be there right now. Do you find that true?

Kelsey Reed: Yes. It's absolutely correct though I have to go back to that word *season* in order to unpack why that would even come to my lips. Scripture is informing some of my word choices a little bit as much to hold my heart and my mind as we engage. Ecclesiastes has been a big part of my meditation in this process. You know that really there's truly nothing new under the sun.

And so while its specific iteration takes on the forms of our, you know, technological age, it is still the condition of man's heart that remains the same. And we just often need to increase that biblical literacy in order to face what kind of literacy we need to have culturally or related to what's in the news with that good foundation.

And with slowing down to minister to our hearts and use even some of the words of Scripture, we can look out with renewed categories for what are we looking at right now. How do we approach this in a way that still maintains that hope and confidence that's instilled in us, in believers, and in students of the Lord's Word?

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, that's beautiful because it is so easy right now for me, and I am a natural melancholic. But I, you know, I appreciate very much your ... I'm curious about your use of the word *categories*. You've said it twice, and it makes me think of tools for thought. How would you define that word and your use of it and your work in providing these categories?

Kelsey Reed: Absolutely *tools* and *categories* are two of my favorite words. And I find if I look in my toolbox, I'm often bringing out different tools related to interpretation of Scripture. You know, what are my hermeneutic tools? You know, how do I even apply those tools to looking at culture? What questions do I ask? What are my paradigms?

So I've got this whole array of tools that I'm slowly trying to unpack my toolbox for the sake of parents – let them look at the things that have shaped my thinking and my engagement as a student of both Scripture and the world. So *categories* is obviously a very familiar term to me, but what I'm hoping to do in terms of an educational process is apply a logic and a sense of reason to the things that often are these untamed emotional responses to what's going on in the world, our heightened anxiety, or maybe even that depressed response that you mentioned that you guys often will struggle with.

We have a number of things that will trigger us emotionally, that when we take it through that educational process of the learning cycle, where we name the things that are going on in our hearts, and we give them some structure, we give them categories. We use good terms to explain what's going on. We wrangle those emotions. We have done our work of logic, applying some logic to that which can feel chaotic, nebulous, defeating. And when we do it in particular with the reference point of the Father, the one who's Lord over creation, not only giving us those tools, but the one who's going to have his way with his world.

And that being our reference point for all of the work that we do to categorize, I find that that tends to unpack my hope as well ... my joy, my peace in the process.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, that's so good; it's almost enviable. It makes me want to know a little bit about your education and how you got to where you are right now. Maybe you could just share with us, you know, briefly, you know, anything of significance from your youth or early adulthood or ... What got you to the point where you can think this way and help other people learn to think this way?

Kelsey Reed: Well, education is obviously an unfolding process that I truly believe is lifelong. We get to be lifelong learners. So every single thing from the moment that we are born and are learning trust in the arms of our mothers to, you know, where I am now and in engaging with further theological categories or whatever that I have been able to benefit from with seminary – it's a lifelong arc.

And so I have to root that in the precious experience that I had in being a child of two believing parents, who also had confidence and hope that was born of their relationship with the Lord. They modeled that for me; they modeled a curiosity about art and culture and music and food.

My dad is a pastor. My mom is a chef. And so it's a beautiful combination for me of exploring the tangible things of the world. And I know that you've used this phrase before: the *intangible things* that are displayed by one who trusts in the Lord and who understands what it means to be an image bearer and then affirms the image bearing status of everybody in their path.

That was my dad. My dad has a robust sense of *imago Dei* and what it looks like to tenderly affirm the person across from him. That was so often me. He affirmed my process. He affirmed how seriously I took the things that I got a chance to experience as a child: going overseas on the mission field, listening to his sermons, having people in our home. Each of these played into that foundation that continued to stoke the motivation of my heart to learn more.

And kind of the capstone to this point of that learning was the seminary degree I finished in 2019. I have three children at home. And so my degree was one of those that flowed over about a ten-year process and got to be embedded in my child-rearing years, which was so good. I had to connect what I was learning and immediately apply it.

So I was saying to my friend just this morning: I feel like my learning process has been much more psychomotor than I thought. I'm much more of an experiential learner than I realized myself to be. So it's been that absorption of beautiful models in my parents, of some lovely teachers through the years.

And then that bringing my learning from my master's degree and that theological training and educational training and having to bring it right to bear into action with my children. So that gives you a little bit of a cross section to try to answer as succinctly as I can. I'm pretty wordy. So thank you for bearing with me.

Evan Smith: It's wonderful stuff. This is Evan here, Kelsey. Hi. I know that the focus is equipping parents as they navigate through conversations and current events with their children. *WORLD Magazine*. Is that accurate?

Kelsey Reed: Yes. Absolutely.

Evan Smith: That's a beautiful thing. And we focus on equipping teachers and teaching parents, ultimately empowering confident and competent communicators and thinkers. So there's some good overlap in everything we all are set out to do here. One of the best things that we like to hear, and I'm sure Andrew especially: feedback from parents, teachers, where they have been able to do that, and situations that have changed, you know, in equipping their students to go out, you know, and do better. Do you have any stories that you've heard from parents you can feel pretty confident you did help equip, you know, that shared that with you?

Kelsey Reed: I can tell of stories that I have helped others, but I don't know. I'd like to share those, but I wonder if even more transparently I could share some story of my own failure to do some of what I encourage and what it means to teach out of that place of humility and failure because of the fact that, again, it's not ultimately up to us that the Lord does use us.

I could try my hand at both answers if that's okay, but you put me in mind to several of the conversations I'll even have with other parents in the workplace.

Evan Smith: That sounds wonderful.

Kelsey Reed: All right. So one of my favorite tools that I've adapted for engagement with my own children is that "halt" tool that I know is born out of a lot of addictive, behavioral 12-step programs: that you are supposed to halt if you are hungry, angry, lonely, tired, sad, that you are supposed to pause in what you're doing and to consider your next action. It's used to try to obviously limit destructive behaviors. But I find that it also limits destructive conversations. If I'm coming home ... Like recently I injured my back.

I'm doing silly things and moving and lifting too much in the wrong places. And I come home from working a full day, and I'm not only hurting; I'm also tired. So multiple categories apply as I engage with my almost 18-year-old. And she also was coming home at the end of a long day. My first instinct was to irritably try to shut down the conversation or to just fix the thing that was coming across to me in her because her emotion was so big that I just really couldn't handle it anymore.

My reservoir was too full at that point. I had to really recognize the posture that I was coming at her with and consider what was also her posture. I needed to do some pause, halt work. There was a couple more things to that process that I need to engage and that I did engage. But I just, in talking with my coworker, mentioned the idea of halting. And she had this light bulb on, of going: I am always engaging with my children from a overly full reservoir or the flip metaphor, an empty tank.

And to be reminded that I can pause a conversation and return to it, that I don't have to fix it all in that moment, or that even if I fail to engage well in those first moments where I am reacting instead of reflecting, it's such good news to my heart that the Lord has given us a manner by which we can return and even repair before we go back into that conversation, and that that's not ultimate failure. It might be, you know, temporal failure, failure in this moment.

But if I go back and do that work—we call it repentance, or in counseling terms we call it doing the work of repair—that that often does much more of the modeling of what my child needs to learn, what my child hopefully will ultimately express in his or her own life: that returning, that repenting repair that is built on this trust of someone who is much larger than us and who has us. I hope that answers some of that question that you're asking me there.

Evan Smith: Yes, that's wonderful stuff. That's probably at the core of everything that your work, your output is. So that's a great answer.

Andrew Pudewa: So I'd like to move into kind of a hypothetical zone and see how you would help a parent deal with, you know, a very tough thing. Let's say that a child, high school aged child (for purposes of hypothetical argument) comes home and says to a parent, "You know, I think maybe I'm BI."

Or they express an opinion, you know, a political question of the day that's very, very much different than that which the parent has hoped to have already fortified that child against. But the influences of peers and/or teachers and probably mostly the very insular nature of social media, where kids get into loops and think everybody thinks this way now.

How would you help a parent address a really hard, almost shocking or frustrating or overwhelming opinion expressed by a teenager?

Kelsey Reed: Well, you've already heard that I have often failed in the exact same type of high intensity, high challenge spot myself. So one of the things that I would want to coach is related to: Your first reaction may not be your best reaction, but that's okay. You know, move back into relationship.

And so one of the first things that I also would want to say is that most key in this is that relationship, is focusing on the foundation that you have laid with that child and affirming them. Taking the steps to affirm what you can through a biblical framework about those questions that they're asking or those things they're observing. So to put it specifically, my child came home talking about a gal who said, I think, this exact scenario: I think I'm BI.

She was very upset and not understanding well. You know, the question for me was, "Mom, how do I speak to my friend about this? Do I need to talk to her parents?" And the first thing that I needed to affirm with my daughter was, first of all, your care for your friend is beautiful. Affirming the things of the heart, affirming things of relationship and speaking to that heart level to hopefully help bring some peace, then going from there after establishing that move into and that affirmation of the relational dynamic of relationship is to move into maybe asking some

questions, obviously getting closer to the heart of things, but allowing them to start responding with their reason and some logic.

You know, get both head and heart in play. Ask this question, you know: “What do you think about what the world is saying about these things? What have you learned about what the Lord says about these things?” And having them hear themselves answer that, which brings, you know, the body into ... I’m very much a head, heart, hands, whole person learning.

I’m a fan of that. And so I often try, you know, how can we get them engaged with thinking about their thinking, expressing their thoughts, even feeling themselves generate those ideas, those thoughts. So affirming the heart, asking the questions to lead them back to truth. And hopefully after doing a couple of those steps and drawing them out, you have won the right also to step in with truth and say, “You remember that the Father is good, and he has a good plan for our sexuality.”

It does not mean that that plan is without the problems that come from us, having taken that plan and those ways into our own hands, speaking to them of the consequences of sin, reminding them of our very first view of that with Adam and Eve, with Cain and Abel – Cain taking into his own hands what it meant to try to solve this relational problem with his brother.

Everywhere you point in Scripture helps to ratify our efforts to reimagine life, to remake life in our own image, to make a different plan. Each of those fails. And so to gently and tenderly point that out, and then let them sit with it. Be willing to let them have some space to sit with it. It doesn’t all have to be resolved in that moment.

Evan Smith: That’s excellent advice all the way around. What would you say, Kelsey, though, for parents perhaps that are just now establishing foundations, or there are shaken foundations or never was a foundation in the first place? What would the encouragement be, you know, for their approach?

I think a lot of the same tools, but you don’t have anything to really draw off of. You’re just coming at this while the storm is coming at you. What would the encouragement kind of be there?

Kelsey Reed: Right. So, I mean, it’d be tempting to say, “Well, hurry up and try to give the tools.” But I don’t think that that is either helpful or even really true. We have all of the provision in the person of Christ. We have all the provision we need in the Father and his Spirit. And so for those who may have a relationship with the Lord but have not catechized their children or laid down this foundation of truth with them or had them deeply invested in Scripture, everything that we need for life and godliness is in the person of Christ and is accessible to us by his Spirit.

We are surrounded by him. I think of Psalm 139 and how he hems us in. I think of other images in the psalms and how he’s like a mother hen brooding over us, his wings over us, you know, to remind our own hearts as parents of the deep and vast supply that we have. And to turn to it quickly in prayer, just to sit and meditate on the fact that we are loved.

And that Father who loves us, loves our children even more than we do. That's like – it moves me obviously. You can hear it in my voice. I am moved by the understanding that the Father's love for my children far exceeds my own. So what does it mean for my heart to be quieted before him and to seek him and to not try to hurry up and use tools and try to ... I think of this house that's falling down, and you're trying to, you know, quickly jam pillars in and create a foundation where you can tell there was none because it's toppling.

That's not our work in that moment. Does that mean we shouldn't return to tools? No, I don't think so. I'm not trying to be like antinomian in this. Like the law is good. The tools are good. We should seek to offer them. But primarily what we need ... We need that resource that we have in the one who loves us best.

Evan Smith: Perfect.

Andrew Pudewa: You must be a pastor's daughter there. There's an interesting term here that I'm seeing in connection with your work there: news coach. I don't know that I've ever seen those two words used together in that idiom or in that context. I find it fascinating because we look at news today almost as though you can't believe anything.

I mean, I have said to my wife: It seems as though we can't really believe anything that we read or hear on the news and that there's whole networks of people who are reiterating, regurgitating, reaffirming things that are clearly not true. So just, you know, the volume of the screaming doesn't add any truth to a claim.

And yet I think a lot of kids – that's something that tips the scale for them. Like the more people that believe this, the more true it must be. So how would you describe the role of a news coach? And I guess, you know, on extension, how do you help parents become a good ... and teachers too; I know you work with teachers ... a good news coach for kids who are just kind of at the mercy of media?

Kelsey Reed: That's a good phrase: "at the mercy of media." I hope that what coaching looks like in terms of this role, this title that has been formed for me. I hope that what that looks like in expression is that merciful presence, that equipping presence. So when we talk about news coach, we are not meaning that I coach that which we should put in the news.

You know, there are people who are far more able to engage that than I obviously. And just, I'm putting it out there because I find I do have to explain this title a little bit and to say what it is not. You know, I'm not a journalist. I was not trained to, you know, to write anything related to newscasting or broadcasting or journalism or reporting though I'm loving learning about that process. It is really a joy to see my brothers and sisters engaged in that way.

But what I get to do as news coach is, I hope, that act of merciful ministration. And that I'm going to have to return to that phrase again, that helps instill a confidence and hope that we can engage what's going on in the world because of it being our Father's world, reminding that his purposes will stand.

I get to do that work of coaching and encouraging the coaching that I pray parents and teachers will feel competent and confident to engage in with their own kids and students. I get to come alongside. I get to talk about what's happening on a day-to-day basis in current events. And I hope that they can also, because of me not only modeling but offering some of those tools, that they can also engage with confidence and hope in coaching about what's going on in our world.

I hope that that answered the question there. It has a tendency even at six months in, at being nebulous sometimes. We are defining what it looks like to be a part of the Lord's supply. Lots of writing, lots of speaking, and lots of still defining what this can look like right now.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I feel like we could go on for hours, but we are coming toward the end of our time together. If people would like to access the flow of information and news coaching and tips and ideas on character development and things, what is the best way for people to get in direct contact with what you offer and with you personally if that's possible? And maybe also finish up with, you know, one very concrete "tomorrow morning I will do this. I can do this" action for parents who are listening now.

Kelsey Reed: So right now, there are two main avenues to connect with me in terms of my writing. One of them comes with a subscription to our students' suite of products. And I have a newsletter that comes out within our parental newsletter every Monday. But again, that is a subscription-based connection with me.

One that is available, I believe, to anyone—it's not behind a paywall of any sorts—is my blog, which can be found at GWnews.com/newscoach. I also ... I really welcome emails. So the email address that I can be found at is kreed@gwpub.com. It's everywhere on the website. They're really trying to help it be found. So I think you can even see that in my blog.

I love interacting with parents. It helps me to refine my helps, to be able to engage the questions that people present to me. And then in a tertiary sense and a few more months down the road, we will also be launching a podcast of our own related to this role. And we hope to solicit more and more feedback and comments and questions from parents that we might have a greater relational engagement of those things. I want to, with that podcast, really help to create space and that moment for meditative reflection over what's going on in our world.

So that practical thing, that practical takeaway that you're asking for, I would say, is carve out quiet time. If you don't already have it in your life, make a moment for reflection alone, where you hush the voices of the world, where you potentially just meditate in the Lord's Word or simply are quiet. It helps with your rhythms. It helps with your limbic system and its response. Carve out that moment for quiet in a very loud and screaming world as you mentioned earlier, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Hmm, that's beautiful. I have to say this because I think it's so cool that your email is K-R-E-E-D,

Kelsey Reed: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: which would be pronounced *creed* if you were to say it, which of course is from the Latin *credo*: I believe. And I don't figure that was any intentionality on your part accidentally, but ...

Kelsey Reed: It's there was no intentionality, but it has been fun to live into a name. My maiden name is Baldwin, and I loved my maiden name. I took a lot of pride in it. Oh, my, did I. But as I've lived into my married name, one of those things has been creed. *Credo*.

Another one has been to see in Scripture that the reed ... You could tell the entire redemptive narrative through just this look at this little word: *reed*. A reed was used to strike Christ when he was on the cross. A reed was where, of course, Moses was hidden and returned from the watery grave that was intended for him. But also most recently, a bruised reed that he will not break.

Evan Smith: That's wonderful. Well, Kelsey, thank you so much for being with us today and sharing all of your information, inspiration, encouragement, ideas. And I think the quiet is a excellent takeaway for everybody, especially after listening to a podcast. Hopefully, there's a little time even now to take that time.

Andrew Pudewa: I would just love, absolutely love, to meet you in person. Until then I'm going to follow you here with this idea of news coaching. I feel like I need news coaching, and I appreciate so much what you've offered for us.

So keep up the great work there. Give our best to all of your compadres at *WORLD*. And I will look forward to hearing your podcast at some point in the near future hopefully.

Kelsey Reed: Thank you. I really appreciate the time I've had with both of you, helping me think about my thinking. What a sweet time.

Evan Smith: Excellent. Thank you, Kelsey.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Google podcasts, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at *IEW.com/podcast*. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.