

Religious Education Continued Reading...

The new movie [“Goodbye Christopher Robin”](#) tells the backstory of the beloved classic, Winnie the Pooh. We all have memories of, connections to and an appreciation for the stories. For me, the memories are of reading the stories at the local Barnes & Noble where my kids would sit under the tree from the 100 Acre Wood next to the honey pot, snuggled close as they listened to the adventures of Piglet, Eeyore, Tigger, Kanga, Roo and, of course, Pooh.

[“Goodbye Christopher Robin”](#) takes us to those same woods. It shares, through a highly personal and sometimes difficult lens, the origins and the outcome of the books’ original publishing in 1924.

It also reminds us to stop and look up from whatever it is that keeps us from being in the moment with our children. Really, the truth is quite simple; the magic of the woods is ours for the taking.

We spoke with director (and dad) Simon Curtis about the movie and the parenting lessons he gained from Pooh. [*The content has been slightly edited for length and clarity.*]

The Washington Post: Today’s world and the challenges of being a parent are, on the surface, quite different from the post-Great War era in which the movie is set. Yet, there are so very many parallels between A.A. Milne’s role as a father and fathers of today. What struck you as most familiar? Relatable?

Simon Curtis: Billy’s parents, Alan and Daphne, were very much typical parents of their class at the time. Children were left with nannies from an early age and then off to boarding school at 8.

What was unexpected was that Alan would be alone with his child. And it is then, during that summer [when] the nanny leaves as well, he discovers how much joy his son and fatherhood give him. I think of it as ironic joy, as it is that summer in which they discover each other and bring life to the book’s characters. When Alan decided to publish the stories, he did so with Billy and Christopher Robin being very separate people, but the world did not see it that way. Alan thought there was a big distinction between his son Billy and Christopher

Robin. The world did not accept that. And so their private world became very public. Perhaps he was the first Dad Blogger?

TWP: What were the standout takeaways — timeless lessons or reminders? What struck you as the biggest reminders that there is no such thing as “perfect” in parenting?

SC: Spend the time on your children when you have the chance, when the time is there. You can offer so much to them and they to you. Do it before you look up and they’re off to college.

I saw a family on the subway last week; they were all noses deep into their smartphones. I wished I could have said to them, look at each other, talk to each other — this will be over before you know it.

TWP: Alan is joyful and inspired by his time in the woods with his son. He turns their mutual losses into an amazing chapter in time which fills each of them with frivolity, fantasy and connection, perhaps in a way they’d never experienced before. And certainly not with each other. It was precious, and prior to the publication of the book, it was private. As a director, how were you able to bring the love between these two characters to life? What did you bring from your fatherhood to the table?

SC: The chemistry between actors was a huge part of it. It was remarkable and was so natural. As for the fun and games — some was scripted and planned, some improvised. When they play in the stream, for example, there was simply a stream, a bridge, and they took it from there. Alan had no idea the massive success of these stories or the impact it would have on Billy who was, by any account, one of the first child celebrities. Much like the popularity of the stories, no one could have predicted Christopher Robin’s instant and unprecedented celebrity status. Alan believed that the world would understand Billy was not Christopher Robin. He was wrong.

From my own fatherhood to my daughters, Matilda, 24, and Grace, 19, I can’t stress enough about being present. One of the big themes of the movie is pay attention. As Nanny says, “You never know what happens next.” And this was true in my life, as it will be in yours — one day your kids will go away. I feel so lucky that smartphones did not exist when my children were coming of age.

TWP: Alan suffers from PTSD. Billy seems to not only “get it” but also makes it his goal to help his father past his very real triggers, which he is able to do in remarkable ways. This seems quite adult for a young boy. How does this translate into parents of today?

SC: Children have a sense of how they can impress and help their parents. It is essential to their survival and happiness. Billy’s father suffered and, as a result, he never quite knew who Alan would be from moment to moment. Little things teach the boy the best tactics to use to keep his father steady. Billy’s character is highly emotionally intelligent, and that helps.

I believe children learn from the parents and parents learn from their children. Similarly, children teach their parents to be parents and instinctively know what triggers their parents — both good and bad. They find the right tactics to stay connected because a child’s desire to be happy with their parents is the biggest thing.

TWP: Did this remind you of your own boyhood?

SC: Father was younger than Alan, but he was from the English literary world. He would read to me at night, and that was something I cherished.

Julia Beck is the founder of the [It’s Working Project](#) and [Forty Weeks](#).