

Remembering the Moral Lessons of Mayberry

When I was in the third grade, every day after school I walked to the beauty shop where my mother worked and usually stayed there until she closed for the day. There was a small black-and-white television set in the front of the shop, and after I dealt with any homework, I got to spend a bit of time watching it.

One of the programs I remember seeing frequently was [*The Andy Griffith Show*](#). It had finished its near decade run from 1960–1968 several years earlier, and it was showing in reruns along with a bevy of other sitcoms from the '60s and early '70s, including [*Gilligan's Island*](#), [*Bewitched*](#), [*I Dream of Jeannie*](#), [*The Beverly Hillbillies*](#), [*Gomer Pyle: USMC*](#), and [*The Brady Bunch*](#).

Even as a kid, I knew there was something that set *The Andy Griffith Show* apart in this collection. It is a nostalgic image from another America, a world that many of us over 50 know experientially, a world that is now well on the road to extinction unless we can fix our culture.

Set in a small rural town in North Carolina, the program was centered on a sheriff, Andy, raising his young son—with maternal help from his aunt Bee—after the early death of his wife. Episodes had Andy helping locals sort through various problems, with generous amounts of country humor.

Everything about *The Andy Griffith Show* exuded warm reassurance and comfort to the youthful me. While fictional, the world was quite touching because it was not that different from parts of real America that I knew personally. It was a world where human decency always prevailed, simple truths were affirmed, and people looked out for one another. Honesty,

courage, loyalty, and responsibility were all unquestioningly championed as the bases of a civilized culture. The program took viewers through the lives of the characters as they learned, embodied, and taught these principles.

I've recently been rewatching some of my favorite episodes. And a common value underlies many of them. Contemporary progressive culture tries to claim this value as one of its own, though the difference in how it's presented in *The Andy Griffith Show* is profoundly telling. Even just a few of the episodes I rewatched make this value and difference apparent.

The [first](#) episode is a story of Andy's son, Opie, being bullied by a schoolmate. Andy engages in the tough parental work of giving his child the tools needed to handle this situation. Despite the urge to directly intervene, Andy knows that Opie needs to learn how to sort such things out—and that it is better to learn this early in life. The portrayal of parental love and concern for a child is among the most heartwarming examples you will see in television at any time.

In a second episode, Otis, the good-hearted town drunk, reveals that he has lied to his brother by saying he's working for the sheriff's office (when in fact he weekly sleeps off binges in the little Mayberry jail) because he feels like a family failure. When Otis' brother pays him a surprise visit, Andy and his deputy, Barney, endeavor to help their friend recover some of his self-esteem. Otis [discovers](#) both that his brother is less perfect than he imagined and that he himself is capable of more than he imagined.

In a third episode, Rafe Hollister, a mountain man with a splendid singing voice, is encouraged by Andy to enter a singing competition. Rafe is selected, but the hoity-toity town officials are unwilling to have an unsophisticated rustic represent Mayberry in the contest. Andy initially tries to clean Rafe up for the performance, but the prejudice of the city slickers against a good man annoys Andy until he arranges

for Rafe to sing at the performance in his full country authenticity. Rafe's [wonderful voice and cheerful character](#) win the audience over completely.

Uniting all three of these episodes is a key moral message: raising up the lowly, a core Christian teaching. It is perhaps most vividly encountered in [Luke 1:52](#): "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble." The bullied, those designated by the world as losers, and those despised by elites are to be recognized in their humanity. And in personally and lovingly endeavoring to help them bear their burdens and challenge those who mistreat them, we simultaneously engage in the work of morally elevating our own character.

What distinguishes the moral lessons of *The Andy Griffith Show*, and traditional American moral culture generally, from the woke progressive worldview is just as evident here. The woke left purports to be concerned with the lowly, but they are more concerned with vituperation against their alleged oppressors than with real spiritual aid to them. The woke way is not about a personal engagement to give Opie the courage to stand up for himself, to help Otis see his gifts in addition to his flaws, or to celebrate the humble origins that gave Rafe his singing ability. It's about endless venom directed at all those who do not share the woke philosophy of aid, which leaps over individuals and their spiritual and character development altogether and uses the cold and spiritless mechanism of the government to appropriate and redistribute.

The woke give us hostile resentment, ugly and frequently misguided outrage, and the indignant demand that others do the moral work they insist has to be done but refuse to do themselves. *The Andy Griffith Show* offers us a deeply American and Christian outlook. In a popular language of wide appeal and accessibility, it presents narratives of human souls taking on and overcoming everyday struggles with the loving help of those close to them. It's a celebration of the

individual worth of each of us.

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