

Not so great expectations



Most moms and dads have great dreams for their children to grow up and do something that matters. From a Catholic perspective, that means discovering and fulfilling God's will for their lives. It's recognizing our gifts and using those gifts to leave a positive mark on the world; to make a difference. Perhaps they'll discover through guidance and encouragement from family, friends and mentors that they're called to be a teacher, doctor, a priest or religious, or perhaps they have a special call to have families of their own in addition to a professional career.

Nowadays, even the sky is not the limit. Given the endless opportunities and in light of the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, for example, you might be among those encouraging your son or daughter to think about becoming the next astronaut, and why not? With God all things are possible. This line of thinking seems reasonable, part of a normal healthy growth process – that is, if normal still existed. Unfortunately, and this holds for more than just Catholic families, we left normal in the rearview mirror a long time ago.

This latest example of the strange land in which we now find ourselves may be tough for parents and those who work with children to comprehend, and it's certainly not what they were hoping to learn concerning how their children would respond when asked that common question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" In celebration of the historic moment in space, Lego conducted a survey in conjunction with Harris polling. However, the results show that even though there are all kinds of great options for kids to pursue, when it comes to the actual aspirations and expectations of little Susie and Johnny, "great" is probably not the word that comes to mind.

Some 3,000 children ages 8-12 from the United States, the United Kingdom and China were given a choice of five career options including astronaut, professional athlete, teacher, musician or vlogger/YouTuber. The results showed that American and British children were three times as likely to choose being internet sensations rather than an astronaut.

That's not to say that making a career in new media and technology cannot be fruitful or meaningful. But other studies show that most who choose this route are not entering into the field to be the online version of [St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta](#) or Dorothy Day. They've been strongly influenced by the culture and believe that attention, fame and money are more important.

It's not exactly news that YouTube vloggers can earn a lot of money and become sensations practically overnight. But what should be a real wake-up call for all of us concerned about children, their futures and the future in general, is that these choices are a dead-end when it comes to real joy and happiness. This was confirmed by comments shared in a Business Insider article from popular vlogger Elle Mills. She has over a million subscribers, but as Mills explained in one of her videos, she comes up empty in the happiness category.

"My life just changed so fast," Mills said. "My anxiety and depression keep getting worse and worse. This is all I ever wanted, and why am I so unhappy? It doesn't make any sense. It's so stupid. It is so stupid."

Maybe it's because I've been there, though not in the famous YouTube vlogger sense. From a young age, I put all my energy, hopes and dreams into being a famous broadcaster. When I reached what I thought was the ultimate job position, it was a lonely, miserable and empty place. If a baby boomer such as myself growing up in a world without the internet, cellphones, satellite TV, etc, can be influenced so strongly by the culture, what does this say for today's kids growing up in our

media-saturated world?

It's said that in addition to hopes and dreams for our children, we have to make sure there is plenty of prayer, silence and reflection if we want them to shoot for something greater.

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