

How To Bring Out the Best in Your Kids - Part 1 – 06.28.09

Intro - Nothing compares -- no job, no career, can possibly compare to the awesome responsibility of raising a human being. There's nothing in the same sphere, even in the same categorization. It is not by accident that the beginning of the parenting process is a thing called labor. It's tough being a parent. The trouble with parenting is just about the time you get experienced at it, you're unemployed. Parenting is full of frustration and challenges but they eventually move out. They leave and you're left on your own.

Before Mary Kay and I got married, I had 4 great theories on parenting and no kids. I now have 4 grown kids and no great theories on parenting.

What does it take to bring out the best in your kids? It takes more than love, it takes wisdom.

"It takes wisdom to have a good family, and it takes understanding to make it strong." Pr. 24:3 NCV

Fortunately, we have a guidebook. God tells us in His word that if we do five things, it will bring out the best in our kids. Those of you who are not parents, this message still applies to you, because these same five principles apply to any relationship. If you want to bring out the best in a friend, if you want to bring out the best in a husband/wife or boss/employee, do these same five things. Today we'll talk about the first two. Next week we'll look at the last three.

1. ACCEPT THEIR **UNIQUENESS** _____.

One of the great tasks of parenting is helping your child or children realize that they are unique, that don't have to compare themselves to anybody else, they don't have to measure up to anybody else, they don't have to be like anybody else, they are an original and God doesn't intend for them to be a carbon copy. They are unique. Just like no two snowflakes are alike, no two people are alike. They are not in competition with anybody else. The Bible tells us that God intentionally makes everybody different.

"God works through different people in different ways..." 1 Cor. 12:6 LB

Stop and think about it... The reason that God makes us all different is that (1) the world would be incredibly boring if He made us all the same. On top of that there would be a lot of work that wouldn't get done. (2) Because if we all liked the same thing, there would be a whole lot of things that nobody liked to do and wouldn't get done. The way that everything gets done in the world is that God makes us all different. Some things turn you on and some things you couldn't care less about.

This is a very difficult task for us as parents to teach our kids that they are unique because there are two competing pressures in the world:

First, the **pressure of conforming** in everything -- peer pressures, advertising, pressures to conform to be alike. People often conform from a desire to achieve a sense of security within a group. Any unwillingness to conform carries with it the very real risk of social rejection. Conformity

can be seen as a safe means of avoiding bullying or deflecting criticism from peers.

The Bible has only two things to say about conforming. The only thing we should *conform to* is the image of Christ. Specifically the Bible also tells us...

“Do not be conformed to this world...” Romans 12:2

So how do you handle this incredible pressure for kids to conform? I think you have to go beyond just ACCEPTING THEIR UNIQUENESS... you must also CELEBRATE IT! From a very early age let them know just how unique they are. Tell them constantly. Start at home. Let them know that you value their difference from their brother or sister. Never ever put them or any sibling down, but always be lifting them up. I would often make a joke of this with my kids: You are my favorite oldest child. You are my favorite son. You are my favorite middle daughter. Of all my youngest children, you are my favorite! The kids would laugh, but they got the message.

Then there's the **pressure of comparing**. In America, we have made comparing a science. In this competitive environment, we compare everything -- how we look, our clothes, our cars, our homes, our intelligence, our background, social and economic status, as if it really matters. You are unique and nobody can be like you so why compare?

“Each person should judge his own actions and not compare himself with others. Then he can be proud for what he himself has done.” Gal. 6:4

Some kids have artistic intelligence and they're really good at some kind of (a) *art or music*. Others of us couldn't carry a tune in a bag and can't paint stick figures. There are others that have (b) *numeric intelligence* and they're good with numbers. Others of us can't add two plus two! Others have (c) *mechanical intelligence* and they're good at mechanical things. Others have (d) *theoretical intelligence* and they're good at dealing with theory and abstract things. Some people have innate (e) *relational intelligence*. They intuitively know how to relate to people. They're a jump ahead of the rest of us, socially. They intuitively feel where people are coming from. **Mr. Wilfong's Advice to Mark.**

How can you tell, as a parent, when you've accepted your kid's uniqueness? **Simple: You stop insisting that they be like you.** As parents, God made us in His image, and now we want to make our kids in our image. So we say either overtly or covertly, You need to be like me. You need to think like I think. You need to like the things that I like. What I like, you should like. The interests I have, you should have. The hobbies I like, why aren't you interested in these hobbies? It's a good hobby. The things I was good at in school, you should be good at in school. The areas I was good at in athletic ability, you should be good at athletically. Or even worse, You should be better. Parents pressure their kids to be Little Moms and Dads. The message comes through loud and clear to the kids, I can't be myself. The only way I get love, acceptance, approval is to be like Mom/Dad. That's what they're expecting.

Second - don't insist that they be like any of your other children! I know you would never intentionally do this, but never compare you kids to one another... even in conversation. Celebrate their differences, their uniqueness, but without comparison. Recognized that the younger

children, especially, will be sensitive to this. At school they will hear, "Oh you're Jennifer's sister!" There's nothing you can do about that. But at least let home be a place where they can be themselves!

Kids are not things to be molded. They're people to be unfolded.

Your goal in life is not to mold kids in your image. Your goal in life is to help them discover what God made them to be.

"... Love does not demand its own way..." 1 Cor. 13:5 LB ." If you really love your kids, you don't demand that they be like you. You let them be different.

One of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible is Proverbs 22:6, **"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."** **Prov. 22:6 NIV** Many people misunderstand and misuse this verse. They think it's a promise and they think what it means is this: If you raise your kid in a godly, spiritual way then they'll always be a Christian. Or, if you raise your kid in a Christian way, they may fall away for a while but they'll eventually come back because God promises *"Train up a child in the way he is old he will not turn from it."* That's not true.

In the first place, this is not a promise. This is a proverb. It comes from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs are generalized statements about life that are generally true about life. They are not promises. They are just statements about life. *In the second place* you need to understand what the phrase "way he should go" really means. Circle that phrase. It does not mean Christian doctrine or the Ten Commandments or the Christian way of life. *It means basically his inborn temperament.* That's what the word means. Your child's inborn temperament, their natural bent, their style, the way they naturally go. Some kids are naturally introverts and some kids are naturally extroverts. You're never going to turn an introvert into an extrovert no matter how hard you try. You're never going to take an extrovert and calm them down. He's always going to be an extrovert. They're wired by God that way.

The Bible says "train a child *in his natural bent, in his shape, in his normal temperament, the way he was meant to be.*" If he was made to be an artist, you don't force him to be a football player. If he was made to be a musician, you don't force him to be a doctor. Understanding your children is very important. God says your goal is not to force them into a mold. The Amplified version of this verse says, *"Train a child in keeping with his individual gift or bent."*

I don't want to shock you... but the world only needs one of you! We don't need any more of you. One of you is enough. One of me is enough. God doesn't intend for one of my kids to be duplicates of me. He has a whole different plan, goal, dream, desire for their life than He has for my life. I need to understand that.

God sovereignly chose to make your kids the way they are. God wired them up in a way that you had nothing to do with. You didn't have any choice in picking out your kid's natural bent, natural temperament. God used your DNA and the DNA of your spouse to create this skill. But He chose which genes would be dominant, He chose which genes would be receptive, He made those kids just the way He made them -- not like you but the way He wanted to make them when He uniquely decided to put them in your family.

When you look at your child and they're acting in a way that is so foreign to you that you want to say, "What planet did you get off of?" you need to trust God's wisdom and realize that God knew exactly what they needed and God knew exactly what you needed and put the two of you together in what's called a family. You've got to trust God.

The first step is to accept them as God's gift to you. You cannot bring out the best in people until first you accept their uniqueness.

2. AFFIRM THEIR **VALUE**

It's not enough to just accept your child's uniqueness you have to take a step further and affirm their value to them. Many parents accept their kids the way they are but they don't communicate that acceptance to their kids. Their kids don't feel valued.

"You made my whole being; You formed me in my mother's body. I praise you because You made me in an amazing and wonderful way. What You have done is wonderful." Ps. 139:13-14 NCV

There is no baby that's born by accident. Even if a parent didn't plan a pregnancy, God knew this baby was going to come into the world and even as that baby was being formed in the mother's body, He shaped the baby in an incredible and wonderful way. He gave value to that baby even before it was born.

How Do I Affirm Their Value?

As parents, it is our job to convey that value to our kids. How do we convey that to them? We have to do it in deliberate and intentional ways, in ways that they can understand. **I have three suggestions for you:**

- **Attention**

The first way to affirm another person's value is through attention. The missing factor in most families today is the time factor. We don't spend a lot of time together. Parents are going in one direction, kids are going in another direction, our lives are frantic and busy. Busyness fills a schedule but it fractures a family.

[Women's Day magazine](#) recently reported survey results that showed the two things that students who had high scores on college entrance exams had in common: they were read aloud to as children, and they ate dinner together daily as a family.

[Dr. Roxanne Allegretti](#), a pediatrician in Fredericksburg, VA, recently wrote that no toy is better than a parent's attention. Expensive toys and videos like the Baby Einstein Collection give the idea that they can help to develop a child faster, better. But Allegretti says nothing is better than a parent getting down on the floor with their child and playing with them. *"This doesn't cost any money. You could sit down with a plastic bowl, wooden spoon and some plastic cups, and make up a more stimulating experience for your infant or toddler."*

What about older children? They want your attention even more! But they won't show it. Nor will they always demonstrate appreciation for it. But trust me, they need it and they want it. You must be the parent!

- **Affection**

The second way you can show that your kids have value to you is through affection. Dr. Gary Chapman wrote the book for married couples named, *The Five Love Languages* - a GREAT book for relationships. He followed this up with another book I highly recommend for parents: *The Five Love Languages of Children*.

Dr. Chapman: "Almost all parents love their children. The fact is thousands of children don't feel loved, because the parents are not expressing their love in a language their child understands."

As parents we need to learn each of children's unique love language, how they each experience love, and then work hard to communicate affection to them. Some appreciate physical affections - hugs. Some like it verbal, to be told all the time. Some like gifts (they all like gifts - but some will hear love in the gifts!) It's incredible how this can affect both learning and discipline.

One other note - You must learn each child as he or she grows. And easy mistake is for a second or third child to be totally different, but we've not adjusted our love language. We say to ourselves, I'm doing the same things that worked so well with Amy... why doesn't this work with Amanda?

- **Appreciation**

Let them know when they've done a good job. Say "Thank You" all the time. Even when it's just household chores you've told them they had to do, thank them, tell them they've done a good job. When you notice your kids working on an area in their life and improving -- especially in those areas that are hard for them and you see little baby steps of growth -- tell them that you see it. (Tough because we just expect it! Do it anyway!)

"A word of encouragement does wonders." Pr. 12:25 LB Showing your kids that they have value in themselves, that God has given them value, will help them to slowly begin to value themselves. Studies have shown that people who value themselves are happier and they get through the tough times in an easier way because they understand and they've been affirmed in their value.

Showing appreciation can be wrapped up with giving attention and showing affection. When our children would do well in school, instead of giving them money or some other reward, I would take them out to breakfast or lunch with me. Just them and me - one on one. It gave me the opportunity to not only show them appreciation, but to give them the attention and the affection they needed also.

Wrap up on Valuing Your Children: Your children will never be perfect. They will never get it all right. But, then, you aren't perfect either. You never get it all right. Sometimes they blow it in a big way. It seems to me, though, that there should always be one place where a child knows *he or she will be valued for their own uniqueness* - and that is at home... with family. And that should never change, no matter how old the child! BTW, this doesn't change with the age or the maturity of children. I still practice all these affirmations even today!

CONCLUSION: I think you can see why I have divided up what originally was going to be one talk into two. How do we bring out the best in our kids?

1. Accept their uniqueness.
2. Affirm their value.

But there is more, which we'll talk about next week;

3. Trust them with responsibility.
4. Correct them without condemning them.
5. Love them unconditionally.

To learn how to do these last three things, you'll have to come back again next week.

PRAY.