

5 THINGS EVERY KID NEEDS TO HEAR (OVER AND OVER)

DAVID PARKS



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APPLETON GOSPEL
CHURCH

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To Tyler, Josh, & Lia.

There are so many things I want you to hear, believe, remember, and share about who Jesus is, what he has done, and your identity, purpose, and value in him. This book is just scratching the surface.

I love you.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is for parents, grandparents, pastors, teachers, children's ministry volunteers, and youth leaders. This book is for anyone with influence in a child's life. Here's what I know about being a parent: Parenting is hard. Stinking hard. I know this. I've been there. I've experienced both the profound joys and the heart-wrenching pain of parenting my children. I've walked alongside the families of friends and extended family members as they've wrestled with the responsibility. And I've counseled, cared for, and prayed with many parents and families in both celebration and crisis in our church.

Parenting is so difficult at times because we live in a broken world. Jesus said, "In this world you will

have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”¹ So parenting is tough, but at the same time, we don’t have to freak out. We can learn and grow as parents. And there is both hope and strength in Jesus. There’s good news!

Here’s good news: There are just a few things that every kid needs to hear (over and over). It doesn't matter if they have a big family or no family. It doesn't matter if they're rich or poor. It doesn't even matter if they're toddlers learning to walk and talk or teenagers learning to date and drive. There are just a few messages kids need on repeat. Why? Because every kid has a few questions that go to the core of their being. They have the same questions regardless of their grades, extracurriculars, or the number of likes, friends, or followers on social media.

Every kid in this crazy world is desperate to find their **identity**, **purpose**, and **value**. They are always wondering, experimenting, and are continually assessing their experiences to answer the questions:

¹ John 16:33b

Who am I?

Why am I here?

Do I matter?

Who am I? is a question of **identity**. Am I an athlete? Am I a musician? Am I a winner? Am I a loser? Am I cool? Am I a geek? Am I a good kid or a bad kid? Who or what defines me? Who am I?

Why am I here? is a question of **purpose**. Is there a direction to my life? Have I been created for a reason? Am I supposed to do certain things or avoid certain things? Are there things I'm supposed to accomplish? What is my purpose? Why am I here?

Do I matter? is a question of **value**. Does my life matter? Does my time matter? Who cares about me? Would anyone notice or care if I wasn't here? What contribution could I make? Do I have worth? Do I matter?

Good questions, right? Let's be honest, how often do we ask ourselves these questions as adults? The answers to these questions form us for good or bad.

Variations of these questions might include:

- Will _____ make me cool?
- Would anyone notice if I was gone?
- Who is my friend?
- Do they like me?
- If I do _____, will they like me more?
- Does it matter if I show up?
- Who is cheering for me?
- Am I talented, smart, athletic, good looking?

As kids grow up, they look to parents, friends, siblings, teachers, pastors, (and eventually) bosses, coworkers, girlfriends, and boyfriends hoping to find the answers. They listen to the (sometimes not so subtle) messages of movies, tv, music, video games, memes, and YouTube videos hoping to shed some light on their identity, purpose, and value. The messages are heard, internalized, and shape life in both healthy and destructive ways. More is caught than taught.

Why does this matter? Why write about what kids need to *hear*? For two main reasons: First, because kids matter to Jesus. Did you know that? Kids are not an inconvenience. Kids are not a chore. Kids are a blessing. They may be exhausting and cause a

certain amount of chaos, but they are a blessing. Every child is a unique life that bears the image of the amazing God who formed them. God has entrusted the next generation to *our* care, and one day, we will give an account of how we invested in the lives of our children.

And second, given the number of destructive, harmful messages that kids hear on a daily basis, we need to learn what kids need to hear that can help them learn and grow and mature in healthy and God-honoring ways. As influencers in the lives of children, we must learn how to speak the truth in love² in a way that connects and resonates with kids.

For these reasons, we must work to understand what kids need to hear and discern what they actually hear from all the other voices in their lives. This will help us grow in our ability to speak the truth in love into the lives of our kids and the kids that God places in our care.

The stakes couldn't be higher. Emma is a typical 15-year-old girl. She has strengths and weaknesses. She's learning about herself and the world around her. Sometimes she's silly, sometimes she's crabby, and sometimes she's insecure. But over the course

² Ephesians 4:14-16

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of her life, she was never told or shown by her parents (or anyone else who really knew her) that she was unconditionally loved. She was never taught that her life mattered regardless of her accomplishments. She never knew there was a purpose to her life. Would it surprise you to learn that Emma developed depression, an eating disorder, an unhealthy sexual relationship, or even considered suicide at some point in her young life? Do you know any Emma's? Finding answers to these questions may be a matter of life or death.

So what do kids need to hear? Here are 5 things every kid needs to hear (over and over): *You are loved, you have value, you have a purpose, not everything is about you, but I'm glad you're here.* Are you ready? Let's get started!

Introduction

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

YOU ARE LOVED

Before our oldest son, Tyler was born, I couldn't really imagine what it was going to be like having a child. Future parents, you can *try* to prepare for having kids. You can read books and babysit; you can pick out toys and nursery colors; you can form your opinions about parenting philosophy, but there's no way to be 100% ready. As boxer Mike Tyson famously said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." This is so true with parenting. *Boom!* Now what?!?

My wife, Holly, and I had been married for almost three years when Tyler was born. We were excited

to have kids! We talked about baby names and how many kids would be too many kids. We tried to anticipate what life would be like going from a family of 2 to 3. And through all of that, I knew that I *would* love Tyler, but I couldn't really love him before he was born. It's hard to love someone you don't know.

And then he was born. I knew I could love him, and I did love him, and I still love him (99% of the time).

I'll never forget the moment we got home from the hospital. For days, doctors, nurses, family members, and friends all constantly checked on us. They made sure baby and mom (and every once in a while, dad) were healthy and happy. And then... they just sent us home! All that attention, and then nothing.

We brought Tyler home to our little apartment and our cat, Quincy, and just set his car seat down in the middle of the living room. We looked at this little life that we had been entrusted with, and thought, "Well (*long pause*), what do we do now?" There were long nights. There were hard days. But there was also so much joy in big and little moments. And, what was hard to imagine before he was born became easy. I loved my son.

The same was true when our son, Josh, and our daughter, Lia, were born. I couldn't imagine what it was going to be like having a second or third child. But now, I can't imagine life *without* them. I love them. It's funny how that works.

But this isn't how it works with God. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ,"³ (emphasis, mine). This means that God chose us and loved us and wanted to adopt us into his family *long* before we were born—before the creation of the world. Crazy. And the plan that God orchestrated through time and space, the plan that centered on the person and work of his true son, Jesus Christ, was accomplished because of God's great and unstoppable love for us.

The Bible is a big, complicated book. Or rather, it's a collection of literature written by dozens of authors over the course of roughly 1,500 years. But the remarkable thing is that the Bible contains one main message, one overarching God-breathed

³ Ephesians 1:3-5a

story. The central message of the Bible is a story that Christians call the gospel. The word gospel means good news. Why good news? Because the gospel reveals that God deeply and unconditionally loves us.

In the beginning, God created human beings to have a relationship with them, love them, be their God, and be with them forever. But then, sin broke the relationship between people and God. So God enacted a rescue mission through the person and work of his son, Jesus Christ. Why? Because God LOVES us! Every human being needs to hear this, but especially kids. Love is the grand motive behind the good news of Jesus. You are loved. You are deeply loved! God loved you so much that he was willing to send his son Jesus to rescue and redeem you from the power of sin and death and everything that holds you in bondage.

But Jesus didn't come kicking and screaming, either. Jesus was willing to give up his life for us. "For the joy set before him Jesus endured the cross."⁴ Who or what was the joy set before him? *You!* You are his joy. God doesn't love you for what you could do for him or because you deserve his

⁴ Hebrews 12:2

love or because he is compelled to love you. God chose to love you. He formed you and sustains you and knows you better than you know yourself. And he loves you and enjoys you. You are his joy. Did you know that?

When kids question their identity, when they wonder, "Who am I?" They need to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they are loved. Deeply, unconditionally, and eternally loved.

God's love forms a strong foundation for their life. No matter what happens, they can know that they are loved. This type of love brings stability to the shifting sands of the imperfect relationships kids will experience throughout their lives. Your kids will likely experience rejection, disappointment, and pain. The hard truth is that as a parent, you can't shield your children from pain. Nor can you guarantee you'll never let your kids down or that you will be with them forever. But you can assure them that God loves them no matter what, and this makes all the difference.

Do your kids know they are loved? How do they know? You can't assume they'll get this by osmosis. They need to hear it over and over. They need you to connect the dots for them. Do you tell them you love them? Do you show them you love them? Do

you tell them that God loves them? Do you help them understand how the work of Jesus reveals the amount of God's love for them? No one graduates from the need to hear the gospel. Do you point them to the deep love of God when they are disappointed and discouraged? It matters that you love your kids. It matters more that God loves your kids.

Children especially need to be reminded of God's unconditional love when they are disobedient or in trouble. The best time to remind a child that God loves them is when they are busted. After their timeout or when they stumble in long after curfew, and they're feeling the weight of their guilt and shame, gently remind them of the unconditional love of God. Just watch their countenance change. This doesn't minimize their sin. It magnifies the grace and forgiveness of God and tells them of the security of their identity in Christ. Now that's good news.

You are loved.

You Are Loved

Memory Verses:

- "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." (Psalm 103:8)

- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

- "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

Notes:

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

YOU HAVE VALUE

We love superhero stories. From *Harry Potter* to *The Lord of the Rings*, to all the *Marvel Studios* and *Star Wars* movies, we turn out in droves for movies with characters who find that they have extraordinary abilities or powers, band together facing improbable odds, defeat the forces of evil, and save the world once again. I think I've seen about 25 movies with that same plot-line in the past decade. It just never gets old!

One of my favorite superhero stories comes from the *Guardians of the Galaxy* movies. The combination of humor, surprisingly great 70's music (come on, it was before my time!), really evil bad guys, and endearing sacrifices made by their misfit

band for each other strike a chord with me. Peter Quill and the rest of the Guardians find that they can overcome all the forces of evil by forming a band of outlaws-turn-good-guys who are willing to sacrificing everything for what's right. Awesome. Way to go, Star-Lord.

But at some point, most kids come to the somewhat disturbing realization that they are very...normal. They aren't the superheroes they watch on tv. They aren't invincible. They are relatively normal kids with relatively common strengths and weaknesses, ordinary successes and failures, and (so far) undetected super-abilities or superpowers. Will a radioactive spider bite them? Maybe. Will they be called upon to save the galaxy anytime soon? Well, probably not.

"So, what if I'm just a normal kid?" they think, "Do I still have value? What if I never do anything extraordinary or ever have superpowers? What if I'm not that popular or that athletic? What if I never get a scholarship or win an award? What if I never make a million dollars or found some great new tech company? Does my life still matter?"

Great questions. What gives a person value? How do you know what your life is worth? This is such an essential concept for human beings to

understand because your sense of worth becomes the lens through which you see everything in the world, your relationships, your accomplishments, and more.

Looking back to the gospel is helpful here, too. Why? Because in the gospel we see that God created human beings in his image. The story of humanity begins, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”⁵

To be made in God’s image means that human beings were created to reflect the glory of God to the world. It says that, to a degree, people are like God, even though they are not gods and goddesses. This means that every person—every man, woman, and child—has intrinsic *value* and *dignity* because they are an image-bearer of God.

An artist can set the sales price of one of their paintings. That’s their right as the artist. So in the same way, God the Creator can declare the value of his creation. So people have worth because God says we do. You have value because God made you valuable! Would God love you if he thought you were worthless? Of course not! You are loved. You

⁵ Genesis 1:27

have value. You're not a number to God. You have infinite worth.

God's view of human worth is radically different than how most people assess human worth. The world says your value is based on your what you *do*, not on *who* created you. Your worth is measured by your net worth. Your importance and value are measured by your fame, your influence, the number of likes and followers you have, your accomplishments and accolades. Or, more devastatingly, your value is measured by your failures, struggles, embarrassments, trauma, disabilities, or sin.

Kids pick up on this at a very young age. So, if we fail to help them see that their value comes from God, they will seek to earn their value through all the predictable ways. Some kids will indeed gain value in the eyes of their friends and others which leads to temporary benefit, but always also leads to pride. Other kids will fail to earn value and will feel crushed. They will think their lives are meaningless and worthless and will find their identity in their failures. What a tragedy! For both sets of kids are deeply loved by God and have intrinsic value because they are made in the image of God. Isn't that good news??

When your value isn't in question, it frees you. You become free to work hard, to give your all to whatever you set your mind to accomplish, but whether you win or lose, whether you are a huge success or you stumble and fall, your inherent worth isn't in question. Do you see the power of this?

But, how do we *know* that we have value? How can our kids be sure?? One way to measure what something is worth is how much someone is willing to pay for it. How much was God willing to pay for you? "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."⁶ Look to Jesus. God the Father was willing to sacrifice his beloved son for you. And Jesus was willing to give up his life for your life. Do you matter? Only as much as Jesus matters, which means that you infinitely matter!

Furthermore, when you believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead, the Spirit of God comes to live within you. *You!* God doesn't demand that you come to an ancient temple or a modern megachurch to be with him. He comes to

⁶ 1 John 4:9-10

you. God knows you better than anyone else, and he's not embarrassed to be with you.

Do your kids know they have value? Kids must hear this again and again. It's easy to think you have less value when you are young. It's easy to believe your life will matter more when you are grown up. But kids have just as much value as adults. Physical size doesn't change your God-given worth. And it doesn't matter how badly they've screwed up or what they've accomplished or how good they look to prospective colleges.

Don't assume kids will get this without explicitly telling them. Your value is not always apparent, but it's real. Do you tell your kids that they matter? Do you tell them that their life has infinite worth? You are not defined by what you do, but what God has done. You are not defined by what the world says but what God says. Do you show your kids that they matter to you? When children are young, this means getting down on their level when you talk to them, so you aren't inadvertently talking-down to them. This means setting down your phone or turning off your computer while they tell you about their day. This means valuing them, no matter what.

You have value.

You Have Value

Memory Verses:

- "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

- "For [God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world..." (Ephesians 1:4a). Here's a longer version: "For [God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Ephesians 1:4-6)

- "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

Notes:

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

YOU HAVE A PURPOSE

Here's a thought experiment: Imagine you've never seen a hammer before. You're walking down the sidewalk of a busy city street. You walk past the scaffolding of a construction site and, as you glance over, you see a hammer for the first time. You see the steel end forged with a blunt, striking surface and a claw. You see the rubber handle with a label on it. Even if you had never seen a hammer before, it wouldn't be hard to imagine that you were looking at some kind of tool. A hammer just *looks* like it would be useful.

But what about people? What about your kids? Do they have a purpose? Have they been created

for a reason? To accomplish certain things? To do something? I have just been making the argument that your value is not related to what you can or can't do. But like a hammer, human beings just *look* like they would be useful.

Human beings can communicate in many ways with each other. We can observe our environment with various senses and learn and grow. We can move around on our own two feet or by amazing things we invent like cars and planes and spaceships. We can organize ourselves and work together to accomplish things far beyond what any one person can do. We can rearrange the elements of this world to invent new things and bring order and beauty out of chaos. Wouldn't it be a shame if all that usefulness was wasted on a life without purpose? There must be a reason for all the potential of humanity! Of course, there is a glorious reason. You do have a purpose.

The Bible starts with these words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."⁷ The exact details of the *how* and the *when* of creation aren't the important parts of the story. The point of this first chapter of the story of good

⁷ Genesis 1:1

news is to reveal God as the Creator and everything else as his creation. This means that the universe is not completely random. Life is not an accident or the product of blind physical forces, as many believe today. There is a loving Creator who stands behind, above, under, and beyond his creation, "...sustaining all things by his powerful word."⁸ If God ceased to sustain all things, all things would cease to exist. So why does God sustain all things? He has a purpose; he has a plan.

Though there is so much chaos, pain, and struggle in this crazy world, God hasn't lost control. After creation, the world was nearly irreparably broken and distorted by sin and death. We see the devastating impact of sin all around us today—in ourselves, in others, and in the spiritual forces of evil at work in the dysfunction of the world. But as the story continues, we discover that God is working a plan of redemption and salvation and new creation out of brokenness, sin, and death. And in this unfolding plan, God has an incredible purpose for your life and the lives of your kids. God has a purpose that is far greater than we could ever ask or imagine!

⁸ Hebrews 1:3

What's the plan? God plans to bring the light and life and love of his Kingdom into the world through (get ready for this) *you*. Here is God's purpose for your life: *To take everything you are and bring the Kingdom of God wherever you go.*

Let's break it down...

- **To take everything you are:** Think of everything that makes you who you are—your identity, gifts, abilities, experience, personality, education, resources, and passions. This includes your strengths and your struggles. This includes the grace and love you've received and your pain and hurt, too. God doesn't want just anyone. And God doesn't want only professionals. God wants to work in and through you. Yes, you!

- **And bring the Kingdom of God:** Simply put, the Kingdom of God is the place where Jesus is King. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, *your kingdom come, your will be done*, on earth as it is in heaven."⁹ (emphasis mine) When God's Kingdom comes into a place, God's will is done there. People start to look, act, and think more like

⁹ Matthew 6:9-10

Jesus. As people experience the reign and rule of Jesus over progressively more areas of their lives (their patterns of thinking/feeling, their relationships, finances, work, worship, etc.), they are transformed by good news in every way. They want to follow Jesus and help others to do the same. This is what it means to bring the Kingdom of God.

• **Wherever you go:** Your location will likely change over time, but your purpose remains the same. People need to see God's Kingdom come and God's will done in our homes, marriages, workplaces, schools, and communities throughout the world. After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus told his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."¹⁰ Our purpose has no bounds (all nations), which might be scary. But then Jesus gave us this promise, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end

¹⁰ Matthew 28:18-20a

of the age.”¹¹ Well, that’s comforting, isn’t it?

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”¹² The word that is translated “handiwork” is a word that means craftsmanship. It gives a picture of God working as an artisan or master craftsman to form and refine us as his masterpiece. But why? Why would God labor over us? Because in Christ Jesus, you have been created to do certain things that God has prepared in advance for you to do. Your life is not arbitrary or accidental. God has a purpose and your life has a God-given purpose, as well: To take everything you are and bring the Kingdom of God wherever you go.

Sometimes it’s hard to see God’s plan. However, like a towering oak finds it’s strength and stability in its roots, so our strength and stability comes from the work of God that sometimes isn’t yet visible. God has a perfect plan for you, even if you can’t see it. Do you believe that?

How does this relate to your kids? Kids are not

¹¹ Matthew 28:20b

¹² Ephesians 2:10

born knowing their purpose. We discover our gifts and abilities as we grow, learn, and encounter different experiences. Kids are not born knowing what the Kingdom of God looks like, either. It takes time to hear and believe the gospel, to learn what it means for Jesus to be the Lord of your life, and to figure out what life in his kingdom is all about. This work is a partnership between the family and the ministry of a local church. And, of course, kids have no idea where they will live, work, learn, and play as adults. But that's all ok. No problem! They're on a journey.

However, as they grow, kids do need to know they have a purpose. And their purpose is far more significant than becoming wealthy, beautiful, successful, or famous. Why am I here? God loves you and made you for a purpose. What's that? To take everything you are and bring the Kingdom of God wherever you go. This is the plan that God is unfolding throughout time and space by the power of his Spirit and the truth of his Word. Oh, and he wants you to play a key role. Crazy, right? But it's true! Do your kids know they have a purpose?

You have a purpose.

Memory Verses:

- "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mk 1:14-15)

- "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT YOU

Recently, Apple was the first American company to cross \$1 trillion in value. Within weeks, Amazon became the second company to break this golden threshold. Now, a trillion dollars is a whole lot of money! How did they create so much wealth?

Apple created i-based products (iPhone, iMac, iPod, iPad, iBooks, etc.) for the i-ndividual to buy and personalize and love. They made things for you (singular). The way they marketed their products spoke to what individual people aspired to be (think of the classic Mac vs. PC commercials). They connected to creatives and cultural rebels with their products and ethos. They influenced the influencers and sold millions and millions of iDevices.

Amazon built an “everything store” selling everything from A to Z (just as the arrow in their logo implies). Amazon saw that without brick and mortar stores, you could stock almost any product on the planet without a considerable cost. Then, instead of having one website for everyone, their site would automatically customize itself based on every individual user’s viewing and purchase history. (Oh, you like this? Then you may want this...) They became a wholly personalized online store that stocked everything for every conceivable demographic of consumer. Brilliant!

Both Apple and Amazon understood and capitalized on the power of the *individual* consumer. More and more things in our culture are set up to serve individual needs. Now, a focus on the individual isn’t necessarily a bad thing! I love getting good product recommendations based on other products I’ve enjoyed. I love my phone. I love my computer. At their best, these innovations, products, and services have solved problems, met many needs, connected people to one another, expanded our imagination, and generated vast wealth. These are good things. However, at their worst, they have unquestionably contributed to a consumer culture based on greed and self-

centeredness. Everything is about me...or is it?

I'm telling you, the sooner your kids learn that not everything is about them, the better your life will be, and the happier they will be, too! Have you ever seen a young child share a toy with another child on the playground only to have the recipient of their generosity start wailing when they want their toy back? Kids can be so unbelievably selfish. Kids don't need to learn self-centeredness. That comes naturally. Kids need to learn selflessness.

Starting life with a **Me-First** mindset is natural. After all, everything in your life is seen and experienced from your perspective. From our view, everything does seem to be about us! However, this leads to our tendency to elevate our needs, wants, and preferences above everyone else's. And this is not right. We weren't made for a *Me-First* mindset. We were made for so much more. We were made for a **God-First** mindset. We were made to give God all the glory he deserves as our Creator, Sustainer, and Savior. We were made to worship, love, serve, and obey God joyfully as his beloved children.

So because of who God is and what he has done, of *course* not everything is about us. This is God's world. It's his story, his life, his purpose. But we are dearly loved and we have infinite value and an

incredible purpose in relationship with God. This is far more than most people could ever imagine! So, bad news, not everything is about you. But good news! Not everything is about you. Why? Because only with a *God-First* mindset will you find true freedom and life. Only with a *God-First* outlook will you find the love, joy, and peace you long for. This is how life was designed to work.

But then, and here's the good news for everyone else on the planet, a *God-First* mindset results in an **Others-Centered** way of life. In other words, loving God leads to growing in your love for other people. How? In the gospel, we see the self-sacrifice of Jesus, not only setting aside his wants and preferences but giving up his very life for our benefit.

When Jesus came into the world, he was the Son of God sent from heaven to rescue the world. He was the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Jesus could've demanded that every king, every ruler, everyone on earth with any shred of power or influence bow down and worship him. That would've been his right. But that's not what Jesus did. Jesus said he, "...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for

many.”¹³

This is so radical, so unbelievable. No one acts like this! People strive to make situations, things, organizations, and people bend to serve their needs. But Jesus was the first person to model true servant leadership. Though he deserved everything, he was willing to give up everything, to give everything to others. He was willing to lay down his life on the cross, to pay the ransom price for others who could never pay. The selflessness, the *Others-Centered* way of Jesus, has the power to displace our natural self-centeredness.

Do your kids know that not everything is about them? Gently reminding kids that the world doesn't revolve around them is a very kind and loving thing to do. Why? Because the world *doesn't* revolve around them! When parents elevate their children higher than they were created to be, it distorts their kids' sense of self-worth and leads to dysfunctional relationships, severe disappointment, and bitterness later in life.

Instead, point your kids higher. Point them to the One who deserves all glory, honor, and praise. Help them to see the glory of God. This will lead to a

¹³ Mark 10:45

right perspective on life and greater happiness for your kids. It won't crush their spirit. It won't weaken their self-confidence. It will lead to greater humility, self-sacrifice, and wisdom in their lives. This isn't just about being more polite or quiet in public. This is about the freedom your kids will have to be able to love and serve others selflessly and sacrificially, just as God has served them in Christ. A *God-First, Others-Centered* life is what life in God's Kingdom is all about.

Not everything is about you.

Not Everything Is About You

Memory Verses:

- "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10) *Note:* Fear in this context is not being afraid of God, but having reverent awe of God's character and work.

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)

- "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11)

Notes:

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE

In my family, I typically do the grocery shopping. I don't mind it at all! I actually love the whole process of cooking, planning meals, growing or picking out the food, prep, and, of course, sharing a big meal with family and any friends or neighbors who happen to be nearby. Though there are many grocery stores in our city, there are only two that I've shopped frequently. One focuses on price; the other focuses on customer service.

When Holly and I were poor newlyweds, about the only thing we could afford to care about was price. But the older I get, the more I care about service. Let me explain.

Store number 1 (the store that focuses on price) is enormous. They have tons of options, and it takes a small army to keep the shelves stocked and the checkout lanes up and running. But I'm convinced that you could spend all day at that store, and never once have an employee notice you, smile at you, and ask how your day was going. When we lived closer to that store and I shopped there more often, I would intentionally try to catch the eye of an employee to see if I could get them to smile. No luck. The last straw was when I was checking out a full cart of groceries, and the checker and bagger were in the middle of a conversation and never once acknowledged my existence—even as I paid!

Store number 2 (the store that focuses on customer service) is an entirely different experience. Sure, you pay a little more for some items, but you can't make it through a single department without a friendly employee smiling, asking how you're doing, and doing whatever it takes to make your experience great. By the time I leave the store, I've had a positive interaction with 6-7 different employees. Every. Single. Time.

I love it. Do you know why? First, because I'm an extrovert and I love talking to people! But second, because the whole time I shop there, I know that

they're glad I'm there. I'm welcome. One of their managers makes a point to come over and say hi every time I see him because he knows I'm a regular. He actually introduced me to a bagger recently. It was like, "He's one of us." Who does that?! I'm definitely a customer for life. That's the power of "I'm glad you're here."

The last thing every kid needs to hear (over and over) is that you are *glad* to be with them. That their presence makes you happy, that you enjoy them. I'm glad you're here. Where? I'm glad you're here at the dinner table. I'm glad you're here with us on vacation. I'm glad you're here in our family. I'm glad you're with me running errands. I'm glad you were born!

These statements speak to how you feel about your kids. Even if your parents weren't good about sharing their feelings with you, your feelings need to be shared aloud. Why? Kids may know you *love* them, but you can't assume they know you *like* them. I know plenty of parents who faithfully provide for the physical needs of their kids (food, clothing, home, safety, etc.), but who never consider their social and emotional needs.

People are physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational beings. We were made for love. We were

made for relationships. We long to know that the people who know us best accept us and like us. In a sense, reassuring a child that you are glad they are with you *proves* the idea that they are loved and have value. This isn't a little thing. If kids miss affection and acceptance at home, they will seek it out anywhere they can find it.

When kids are young, and they aren't sure if their presence matters (if anyone is glad they are there) they typically start to act out. A significant amount of misbehavior—yelling, fighting, being mean, causing chaos—comes from kids merely seeking attention from the adults that are ignoring them. They push the boundaries to see what, if anything, will happen. This breaks my heart. This shows that kids long for positive attention so much that they would rather have negative attention from their parents than no attention!

Listen, I know that being a mom or dad is tough. Parenting is a full-contact sport, and it's not always fun. When you are sleep-deprived and in survival mode, it's hard to get ahead of your kids enough to pay attention to their social and emotional needs. I've been there, and I get it! But even Jesus needed to hear affirming words from his Father in Heaven. At Jesus' baptism, God the Father said, "This is my

Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”¹⁴ Don't you see? The Father didn't just say, “I love you.” Although, that would have been nice. The Father said, “with him I am well pleased.” In other words, my son makes me happy; I enjoy him. He didn't text him; he didn't email him, he spoke the words aloud so others could hear. No one had any question about how God the Father felt about his beloved Son.

Do your kids know you're glad they're in your life? When we say “I'm glad you're here,” we reflect the heart of our good Father in Heaven. This combination of love and affection will give kids stability in their identity and self-worth.

But please don't stop telling your kids how you feel about them when they are teenagers or even when they're adults. Your teens might roll their eyes at you and mumble some sort of “thanks” or “sheesh, dad/mom” or something like that. But they hear you, and they take your words to heart. You have no idea the power of your words.

I'm glad you're here.

¹⁴ Matthew 3:17

Memory Verses:

- "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'" (Exodus 33:14)

- "He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me." (Psalm 18:19)

- "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" (Revelation 21:3)

Notes:

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

FINAL THOUGHTS

In many ways, we're just scratching the surface with this short book. There are so many things that kids (and really every human being) need to hear and know and remember to grow to maturity in life and faith. However, if kids hear and see that they are loved, they have value, they have a purpose, that not everything is about them, but you are glad they're here—it will significantly help them navigate the rough terrain of life. You will be setting them up to succeed, no matter what they will face.

Make it your mission as a mom or dad that your kids hear these 5 things often. Make it your goal as a mentor, friend, children's ministry leader, or youth

leader to speak the truth in love into the lives of the children that God entrusts to your care. Not one-and-done. Share these statements over and over until they roll their eyes at you when you repeat them. (By the way, that means they've actually heard you!)

However, as you repeatedly share good news with your kids, do not make the mistake of thinking that their future success or happiness depends entirely on you. That's a quick path to crippling anxiety and worry. In Mark, chapter 4, John Mark records The Parable of the Sower.

In the parable, Jesus says a farmer scatters seed, and it falls on different soils. Some soils are not productive, but one soil produces a ridiculous and (apparently) supernatural harvest. Jesus says, "The farmer sows the word."¹⁵ Sometimes, when you share the good news of God's word, and specifically when you share these 5 things, nothing happens. At least, nothing happens right away. However, Jesus says that, "Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown." In God's timing, and with a heart of faith,

¹⁵ Mark 4:14

there's a great harvest.

The Apostle Paul understood this concept. He wrote to the Corinthian church, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."¹⁶

Our responsibility as parents, or as adults who have influence in kids' lives, is to plant and water seeds of good news. Don't give up. Don't succumb to discouragement. Stay faithful. But remember it's God who brings the growth. You are not God! You can't force your kids to believe what is true about their identity, purpose, and value. But you can pray like crazy that God will bring the growth. At the end of the day, you must *trust* God with the lives of our kids. You must believe that God does love them and care for them and is working all things for their good in Christ.¹⁷

Now, there are no guarantees in life, but if kids have heard these 5 things, on repeat, they'll be much more likely to have stability in their identity, purpose, and value. And that stability has the power

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

¹⁷ Romans 8:28

to transform *generations* with good news.

Even if your kids are grown, it's never the wrong time to do the right thing. Start saying these things to your adult kids today and watch what happens.

"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts."¹⁸ May God bless you on your journey as a parent. May God bless your influence over the next generation. Remember that you are never alone. God loves you and is with you. And, for what it's worth, I love you, and I'm here for you, too.

- Pastor David

¹⁸ Psalm 145:3-4

Final Thoughts

5 Things Every Kid Needs To Hear (Over and Over)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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