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Chapter One: What's Missing - Kids Need a Rite of Passage

What's Missing?

In the post-World War II era, as our culture completed its move from the farm to the suburbs, it managed to take away even more of our children's tasks and responsibilities. The new suburbanites enjoyed the ease and comfort of their modern lifestyle. Many of them were thankful that their kids didn't have to work as hard as they had during their own growing-up years. What the parents failed to realize was that this hard work had actually helped them in their progress toward capable, responsible adulthood. The fifteen-year-old, once thought of as a man with adult skills who could drive and run a farm, was now stuck in high school and told he was "just a kid." Hine puts it like this:

What was new about the idea of the teenager at the time the word first appeared during World War II was the assumption that all young people, regardless of their class, location, or ethnicity, should have essentially the same experience, spent with people exactly their age, in an environment defined by high school and pop culture. The teen years have become defined not as an interlude but rather as something central to life, a period of preparation and self-definition, a period of indulgence and unfocused energy. From the start, it has embodied extreme ambivalence about the people it described . . .

Our beliefs about teenagers are deeply contradictory. They should be free to become themselves. They need many years of training and study. They know more about the future than adults do. They know hardly anything at all. They ought to know the value of a dollar. They should be protected from the world of work. They are frail, vulnerable creatures. They are children. They are sex fiends. They are the death of culture. They are the hope of us all.

Many of the problems today's parents encounter in raising their McDonald's kids trace directly back to this cultural shift and the gaps it created. Often, parents come to me and say, "What have I done wrong? Why can't my kids grow up? Why don't they become responsible adults?"

I respond by teaching them about the cultural changes, saying, "What if I tell you it's not your fault? It's the culture; and I can help you learn how to overcome the shift."

"You mean I'm not such a bad parent after all?"

Just like these parents, you are a much better parent than you think you are. Very few parents today have been instructed in ways to handle the cultural shift. Once I

teach you about Rite of Passage Parenting, you will become responsible for going back and casting these essential experiences into your children's lives.

Cultural commentator Frederica Mathewes-Green paints a vivid picture of what's missing today when she writes about the classic 1946 Christmas movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*, comparing its implications to those taught by our culture:

George Bailey has dreams of being an explorer and traveling the world, but he keeps nobly setting these aside in order to care for his family. Nobody would make this movie today. In today's version, George Bailey would have a screaming fight with his father, storm out of the house, hop on a steamer, circle the world, have dangerous and exciting adventures, and return home to a big celebration. His dad would then tell him, with tears in his eyes, "You were right all along, son."

Chapter Three: Essential Experience #1 - Mark Their Maturity Through a Rite of Passage

Preparation, Event, and Celebration

What can you do to provide closure for your kids' childhood, equipping them for life by helping them move into responsible adulthood? You already know the answer: You provide a rite of passage, a definite step between the two realms. However, you don't just wake up your child one day with the words, "The time is here. Today . . . you are an adult!"

In the Jewish culture, children hear about their upcoming Rites of Passage as soon as they are born. From their earliest days, their parents consciously and deliberately cast into them a vision for adulthood. They tell their children again and again that a day will come when they will lead in temple worship, share a memorized portion of the Torah, and begin to accept adult responsibilities. The mitzvah ceremony is an event in which the child demonstrates adult skills. However, it is also a celebration of the preparation that has brought the child to this point.

The overall definition for rite of passage includes all three components: preparation, event, and celebration. Rite of Passage Parenting teaches you how to use these elements, along with those discussed in the three remaining sections of the book, to incorporate back into your kids' lives the four essential experiences that our culture lost when it shifted.

Chapter Four: What's Missing - Kids Need Significant Tasks

Unlike past generations, where kids performed real work that mattered, today's kids have no true Significant Tasks-special assignments that demonstrate their worth to the people who are important to them.

When I was a youth minister, I learned one important fact very quickly. In church work, youth pastors rank at the bottom of the pay scale. First comes the pastor, then the minister of music, then the minister of education, then the janitor, and then . . . the youth pastor.

Because of this well-known truth, church members occasionally took pity on me. In one church, a deacon even gave me a car. Of course, this was after he figured out that no dealer would take it for a trade-in. In a move calculated for maximum spiritual impact, he blessed our family with his extra vehicle.

Like many of the offerings given to the church or its staff, this one needed more than a little help. It was always breaking down, and I always needed to work on it. One day I was underneath the car, tinkering away in an effort to fix something else that had gone awry. I heard a little voice tentatively calling out, "Dad."

I looked up and saw Caleb's scrawny four-year-old legs squatting down beside me. His head was turned sideways as he peered into the darkness, trying to figure out what his dad was doing under the car. His blue eyes gazed trustingly into mine. "Dad, can I help?"

At least he wasn't offering to sell me a free apartment guide. At first, I was tempted to tell him, "No. There's nothing you can really do. Just let me get to work, son-that's about all the help you can give me until you get a whole lot bigger."

This wasn't what I said, however. There are at least a few times when I . . . get it right. "Caleb!" I said as in amazement. "I am so glad you came along just now. You see, my tools keep rolling away from me every time I set them down. Do you think you could hold this screwdriver so I don't lose it, son?"

"Oh yes, Dad. I can do that!"

Caleb clasped the tool close to his chest, holding on to it tightly in his eagerness to assist me. Every few minutes, I would take the screwdriver from his sweaty hands,

reach up underneath the car, and make a bunch of important-sounding noise.

About this time, Cathy came walking by. Caleb could hardly wait to share his important news. "Look, Mom! I'm helping Dad!"

Later, when I thought I had banged around sufficiently and maybe even solved whatever problem the car had that time, Caleb and I went inside. The first thing he did was climb up on a chair beside his mother and puff out his little chest, announcing, "Mom, I helped Dad fix the car!"

We may smile, but we also understand: Those few minutes in the garage meant a lot to Caleb. Even at a young age, he wanted to have a vital, important part in his family. He wanted what I call a Significant Task.

Chapter Five: How It Shows - “You Can’t Do That. You’re Just a Kid!”

The loss of Significant Tasks has left kids lacking in knowledge and skills for responsible living, and our culture prevents even kids who have these skills from performing Significant Tasks.

One of my students had an experience with an airline that clearly demonstrates the problems our culture has because of its shift away from giving significant tasks to emerging adults.

Fourteen-year-old Andrew Pieper had committed to giving up his spring break to serve others across the border in Mexico. The cross-cultural team to which we assigned him planned to minister to orphans living in Children’s Homes. In order to raise money for this trip, Andrew acted as an adult. He printed and posted flyers offering his services as an amateur magician, cut and edged neighbors’ lawns, and even spoke before a large group about his trip and the significant tasks he would assume during his week of service.

Andrew’s trip was a significant task as well as a rite of passage event. On his own, he washed and folded his clothes; packed, and made sure he had everything he needed. The night before the trip, he spoke with his parents about the problems he might encounter, including missed connections or cancelled flights. He knew what to do in each situation. Andrew was all ready to go . . .

At least he and his parents thought so. Because of the extended period of Adolescence that our society has created, we never assume that young people have the basic skills for living until they’re much older than fourteen. Andrew had used the money he raised to pay an adult fare on a flight with a major airline. However, at the ticket counter, he discovered that, at least as far as the airline was concerned, he was . . . just a kid.

Even though in only a few hours he would travel across the border and into another culture, taking on adult responsibilities and leaving his adolescence behind, the airline made him pay an “unaccompanied minor” fee of seventy-five dollars each way. As he boarded the plane, the airline required his dad to walk Andrew all the way through security and up to the door of the gate. When he had to change planes in another city, an airline attendant took him from the plane to a holding area and onto the next plane.

Our culture definitely sends mixed messages about significant tasks, just as it does about the age that adulthood begins. If a student like Andrew attempts to take on

a significant task, society fights against him. At fourteen, Andrew was old enough to babysit his younger siblings, but the airline still said he needed . . . a babysitter.

As he prepared for the trip and served in Mexico, Andrew acted as a McDavid's Teen, taking on adult responsibilities and significant tasks. Once he returned from Mexico and arrived at the airport, however, the airline once again told him he was only a McDonald's Kid, lacking in the knowledge and skills to understand posted departure times or find his way from one gate to another.

Is it any wonder our kids are having a hard time growing up? The few who dare to stand up and take on adult responsibilities find society standing right there to turn them away. A rite of passage event, which Andrew experienced in Mexico, clearly marks the line between childhood and adulthood. Our culture does its best to blur that distinction. Almost as soon as Andrew began taking on adult responsibilities and significant tasks, society said to him through the airline, "You can't do that-you're just a kid!"

Chapter Six: Essential Experience

#2 - Extend Their Life Skills Through Significant Tasks

Slowly, Slowly, Grows the Elephant

Before he began his teaching career, my college Greek professor spent years working with tribal groups in Africa. When we would express frustration with some aspect of our language learning, he would always quote the same Swahili proverb, "Slowly, slowly, grows the elephant." He used this saying to tell us that neither elephants, nor Rome, nor the knowledge of Greek is built in a day. He helped us to build our command of the language little by little and step by step.

In the same way, we build simulator tasks on top of simulator tasks into our kids' lives, properly laying the foundation for future significant tasks. This is a part of the rite of passage preparation discussed in Section One.

An agricultural society provides a systematic way of doing this. You don't butcher the cows when you are three years old. Instead, you start out by herding them and carrying their feed. The culture allows for this natural progression from smaller simulator tasks to larger ones and, eventually, to significant tasks.

In my job, I travel and speak to many people, including groups of college students. I have talked with a number of resident advisors (RAs)-upperclassmen who supervise younger students living in dormitories-who tell me about the problems they face because students lack basic skills for living. One young woman, her RA told me, packed a dormitory washing machine so full of dirty clothes that its agitator could not even spin. She had never before done a load of wash.

Rite of Passage Parenting emphasizes that "slowly, slowly," you need to give your kids simulator tasks that build skills and responsibility. For example, I recommend that you teach your kids to do their own laundry by the age of eight. It costs only about twenty-five cents to do a load of wash. You can give your child valuable skills for living that many others lack . . . a quarter at a time.

We've all seen mother birds patiently teaching their babies to fly. In our day, we follow the opposite pattern. At a certain point, we kick our children out of the nest and expect them to fly-without any simulator training. We haven't taken the time to build significant tasks into their lives. Since our overgrown baby birds have spent no time on simulator tasks, they have no skills for living. Small wonder that many end up as Boomerang or B2B kids.

Remember, Mom and Dad, it's never too late. If you have older kids who haven't learned to perform the tasks they need to take care of themselves, you can start today. That way, they won't remain stuck in the simulator, but will move on confidently to increasingly significant tasks. They will have the skills to handle their lives as capable, responsible, selfreliant adults.

Chapter Seven: What's Missing - Kids Need Logical Consequences

Susie and the Science Fair

Failing to allow children to experience logical consequences has helped make the annual school science fair what it is today: every parent's nightmare: You know the story, because it's probably happened in your home . . . perhaps more than once.

It's Thursday night, and little Susie is already in bed when a cry goes up from her bedroom, "Oooh nooo!"

Anxious parents: "What's wrong, honey?"

Susie: "I forgot."

Parents: "What did you forget?"

Susie: "I forgot that we have a Science Fair Project due."

Parents: "When is it due?"

Susie: "Tomorrow."

Parents: "What? The Science Fair is tomorrow? Oooh nooo!"

Mom and dad get little Susie out of bed and begin consulting all sorts of books and online resources, trying to figure out how to make a last-minute project that will astound the judges. Before long, dad heads off to Super Wal-Mart, armed with a yard-long shopping list and thanking God that the store never closes. There he meets thirty other parents, and guess what? Only moments ago, these parents, too, found out about . . . the Science Fair.

Sometime after midnight, little Susie gets so sleepy that mom and dad send her off to bed. With the project due in the morning, they have no choice but to stay up and finish it. In fact, as far as they are concerned, the project has become their significant task. Mom types away at the computer while dad runs the complicated experiment, using his digital camera to take pictures from various angles. They work together to prepare a brilliant display. Just before breakfast, they wearily awaken Susie, secure in the knowledge that they have shielded her from the shame of admitting to her teacher, "I forgot."

You see, I know about those all-nighters. I've been to those science fairs, and I've easily identified the projects that mom and dad put together. You know how I know? Kids don't weld nearly that smoothly!

When children do not face logical consequences for the choices they make, they learn that every choice (and every outcome) is negotiable. If a teacher gives Little Johnny a detention, his mother will go to the school and talk his teacher out of the discipline. If Little Susie fails a college course, her father will call the professor and get the F erased from her transcript. I tell parents this: Where there are no logical consequences, there are no values.

For a little over ten years, I served as youth minister at First Baptist Tulsa, an inner-city church. Because of our location, a number of interesting characters came through our doors. The church is located directly across the street from a Trailways station. Whenever a bus unloaded, some of the passengers typically came across the street to see what the church might have to offer in the way of food, money, or other help.

Our church contained the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor, and my youth ministry reflected the same thing. One of the students in my youth group could open a locked car and start it within seconds. In fact, he was so good at this that he demonstrated his skills . . . fifty-two times. After his arrest, he was taken to juvenile court. Since he was so young, the court decided not to prosecute him or do anything else about the stolen vehicles.

The young man learned a lesson from this experience. Since he experienced no logical consequences for hot-wiring and driving fifty-two cars, he learned to continue his life of crime. Where there are no logical consequences . . . there are no Values.

Our society reflects that truth from top to bottom. During the OJ Simpson trial, I was living in Budapest, Hungary. My Hungarian friends all told me the same thing, "You Americans can get away with anything. The more money you have, the less pain you experience." They were talking about . . . logical consequences. Little children have no trouble learning about logical consequences, as long as parents are willing to provide them. If you put your hand on a hot stove, it hurts. You assign a value (good or bad) to an activity (putting your hand on a hot stove). The Logical Consequence of putting your hand on a hot stove is that your hand gets burned. Once you know that, you keep your hands away from hot stoves.

Through my work, I have spent time in Muslim cultures. In the open-air markets in Muslim cities, you will find gold necklaces, chains, and bracelets freely displayed . . . yet none of them ever disappear. The parameters are established well ahead of time: If you take any of the gold jewelry-in fact, if you take anything-you get your hand chopped off. Everyone knows that, including potential thieves. That culture has instilled strong logical consequences that have molded the society's Values, Beliefs . . . and behaviors.

Chapter Eight: How It Shows - “What Were You Thinking?”

Right Values, Wrong Beliefs

Before the cultural shift that caused the dissolution of many ethnic communities, parents and children shared the same values and beliefs, and the community around them supported both. Today, even when family members share similar values, the modern world bombards children with all sorts of incompatible Beliefs. The fact that many kids choose to adopt these strange Beliefs as their own is the cause of much family conflict.

Mom and Dad, it’s not your fault. The cultural shift has brought such a wide range of Beliefs into the average home that now we see even kids raised in church suddenly showing up in Gothic clothes, watching inappropriate shows, and running around with friends who do not share their faith-based Beliefs. Even if we have laid a foundation of right Values into our kids’ lives, the wrong Beliefs promoted by our culture encourage them to act in ways we could never have anticipated.

Even with a foundation of right Values, parents and children alike can hold multiple wrong Beliefs that guide their conduct. This mismatch causes both inner and outer conflict, forcing the individual to justify wrong actions. To return to our building analogy, they resort to props-statements of false thinking or faulty logic that enable someone to rationalize his or her choices.

For example: one student values sexuality a right value). Therefore, she believes in waiting until marriage to have sex (a right belief). Another student also values sexuality-and therefore, she believes she should only have sex with someone who “loves” her (right value, wrong belief). As long as she is in love, she can justify having sex.

One student values good grades (right Value), so he believes he must work hard in school (right Belief). Another student also values good grades, so he believes he must cheat to ensure a high GPA (right value, wrong belief). He justifies his actions because he understands good grades to be the surest way to a secure future.

However, the future is not bright . . . in either case. Scripture says, “For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7 NKJV). Because these students have not learned to distinguish between right and wrong Beliefs through properly experiencing logical consequences, the effects will be even more devastating when their rationalizing props are ultimately pulled away. When this occurs, their building will . . . collapse.

As the boys grew, Cathy and I worked to raise our children according to the will of God, as revealed in his Word. This is the only reliable source of universally right values and right beliefs. We worked hard to instill these right beliefs and values into their lives, and we fought hard against those that were contrary to its wisdom.

Chapter Nine: Essential Experience #3 - Build Their Discernment Through Logical Consequences

Build Their Discernment Through Logical Consequences

We can teach our kids to make wise choices by properly using logical consequences to build right values and right beliefs into their lives.

One day, when he was in seventh grade, Jeremiah came home from school with a sad story. "Dad," he said. "I got a problem."

"What's that, Jeremiah?" I said with genuine fatherly concern.

"My homeroom teacher gave me a detention."

Now, I never got upset when the boys got a detention. As far as I was concerned, a detention represented logical consequences for something they had done, so it always made sense.

"What did you do that gave you a detention, son?"

"Well, I was sharpening a pencil at school. I had just finished and was flipping it in my hand. It just accidentally flew up and stuck in the ceiling!" He went on to explain that as the pencil hung there in the ceiling tile, quivering, the teacher walked in and saw it.

"So now I have a detention after school tomorrow. You need to come and pick me up."

As usual, I had my answer ready. "Jeremiah, have I not already taken care of my responsibility as a dad? Our contract says that all I have to do is get you to school and back again." Because we lived outside the district where our boys attended school, we paid fifteen dollars a month for their bus ride. "I've already paid for your ride home tomorrow."

Jeremiah had his answer ready, too, only it sounded more like a question.

"Dad-what am I going to do?"

"Well, you could try renegotiating with the teacher. Maybe she could consider an alternate form of discipline. Maybe you could find that kind janitor-you know, the one who befriends the school kids in all the movies? Maybe he would bring you home."

Jeremiah didn't appear overly impressed with any of my suggestions.

"Let's see. Maybe you could walk home. It's only three miles, and you'd have to cross a major freeway. Or . . . you could call a taxicab. Here, I'll look up the number for you." I flipped through the Yellow Pages, wrote the number down, and handed the memo to my son, confident that he would appreciate my helpful spirit.

When Jeremiah left for school the next morning, Cathy and I had no idea how he would get home. I pictured my wife jumping into her Buick, driving to the school, and following three feet behind him all the way home. I decided to come home early from work that day . . . just to make sure Jeremiah could get the full benefit of the logical consequences before him.

Three o'clock-Jeremiah's normal time to return from school-came and went, and Cathy (just like Mary when Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem) began to worry. Three-thirty came, and then 4:00, 4:15, 4:30 . . . finally, at 4:45, a yellow-and-black taxi pulled into the driveway.

Cathy and I peeked out from behind the curtain and watched as Jeremiah climbed out of the taxi, pulled out his little brown cowboy wallet, unzipped it, and paid the driver. I ran back to my chair and picked up the newspaper, trying to appear nonchalant. Within another moment, our son was inside the house.

"How was school today, Jeremiah?" I asked cheerfully.

He glared at me. "Five dollars and ten cents!"

About six months later, Caleb came home from school and said some words that sounded familiar: "Dad, I have a detention tomorrow."

Even if I hadn't already known better than to ask about the reason for this detention, I didn't have the opportunity to raise the issue. Caleb was prepared, having witnessed the logical consequences his older brother had experienced.

"Dad, can I hire you to come pick me up after school?"

"Well, I don't know. How much do you think you need to pay me?"

"Five dollars and ten cents." He went to his bedroom, retrieved his wallet, and paid me the money.

The next afternoon, I drove to the school and picked him up. Leave it to Caleb. He not only understood logical consequences, but he used them to . . . negotiate.

Chapter Ten: What's Missing - Kids Need Grace Deposits

Kids Need Grace Deposits

The cultural shift has left our children's lives lacking in "grace deposits" -statements or actions that communicate an individual's intrinsic worth in a way that he or she finds meaningful.

Let's look in on our old friend John-Boy. Who lives in the Walton homestead? Of course, John and Olivia Walton, their active brood of children, and John's parents, Grandma and Grandpa Walton.

I like to tell parents that it takes two things to raise a child: Law and Grace. In fact, it takes 49 percent law and 51 percent grace to complete the job. We'll discuss those percentages later.

I remember an episode of *The Waltons* in which John-Boy sat on the front porch, crying and distraught. The screen door opened, its hinges creaking as Grandpa pushed through the doorway and stepped onto the porch. He sat down beside John-Boy and put his arm around his grandson. His rough words overflowed with love as he reminded John-Boy of his importance, and of how much he appreciated having him as a grandson. Before long, John-Boy's sobs had subsided, and the pair laughed together over one of Grandpa's funny stories.

Once again, the Walton family paints a perfect picture of what has shifted in our culture, leaving an enormous gap. In an agricultural society, not only Grandma and Grandpa, but aunts, uncles, and other extended family lived close by. In every generation, mom and dad have the job of being . . . the law. We tell our kids to sit up straight, eat their food, do their homework, and go to bed on time. The law side of parenting is part of the way we instill right values and right beliefs into our children. rite of passage parents know that's important.

Grandparents have a different function within the family. Their primary job is to tell their grandchildren of their worth and value. I was blessed to have grandparents who did this. Every time I looked into their eyes, I saw myself as a person with potential. They knew I was going to grow up to be somebody. They believed that, they told me that, and they affirmed that in my life.

In the relatively short time, our culture has shifted so that an increasing number of families have moved away from the people who put value and worth into their children's lives, away from the people who taught mom and dad how to be mom and dad. When the Waltons' children were growing up, it was Grandma

and Grandpa who taught John and Olivia, and gave them wise advice on raising children. The episodes of *The Waltons* contain many scenes where the family sat around the table and talked about decisions, problems, joys, and sorrows. The intergenerational sharing that the show portrays was commonplace before the cultural shift.

Suddenly, Grandma and Grandpa have changed. They've sold the farm, bought a Winnebago, and are on their way to Las Vegas with a bumper sticker on the back of their motor home that reads, "Out spending our children's inheritance." All of a sudden, grandparents don't want to be grandparents any more.

Chapter Eleven: How It Shows - “You’ll Never Amount To Anything!”

How It Shows: Peer Dependence

Counterfeit grace appears in a variety of forms. One of the most familiar-and frustrating-to parents is the way McDonald’s Kids turn to others just like them in search of individual identity.

John-Boy and his brothers and sisters had no trouble with Identity. They understood who they were because they knew what they did (simulator tasks and later, significant tasks) and because their parents, grandparents, and other relatives had added plenty of grace deposits to the right values and right Beliefs they had already instilled in their lives. After each of them experienced a rite of passage, they approached capable, responsible, self-reliant adulthood in complete security. When they had questions, they went to their elders. When they had concerns, they went to their elders. When they had problems, they went to their elders. Intergenerational contact gave them . . . grace deposits.

Today’s grandparent-less, grace-less generation fears rejection so much that its members feel a strong pressure to conform to the group, says psychologist Ronald Koteskey. The psychological term for this is peer dependence.

Unfortunately, those other teens do not know who they are either, so peer pressure becomes a case of “the blind leading the blind” . . . Such conformity shows in actions, language, beliefs, possessions, and, most obviously, in dress . . . If parents suggest wearing something not “in” with the group at the moment, the suggestion will be met with, “Do I have to wear that?”

Social psychologist Solomon Asch showed that adolescents conform, even to a group of strangers, on such a simple thing as judging which of two lines is longer. When making judgments alone, teens made errors about 7 percent of the time. When judging with a group of three or more people, they made errors about 33 percent of the time if the rest of the group was unanimously against them.

As the differences between the lines became less, the teenagers conformed to the group more. If they were made to feel less competent than the others in the group, they conformed even more. Unfortunately, many of the decisions adolescents make are much less clear-cut than judging the lengths of lines. Since they are also unsure of their identities, they are likely to conform to nearly anything the rest of the group does . . . They look to others to decide how to act because they do not know who they are.

A grace-less teenager whose spirit account has zeroed out alienates himself from family relationships. At this point, the teen is most susceptible to the lure of a gang or cult. Both of these subgroups offer the addition of counterfeit grace by providing the teen with the accepting, approving, affirming words and actions he craves. Since these kids either do not get or do not perceive that they get adequate grace deposits from their parents and extended family, they seek them elsewhere.

Even a "good" group can cause problems in teens' lives, as Koteskey points out:

Unfortunately, conformity is not a good answer to identity, even if teens have chosen to conform to a "good" group rather than to a gang. In earlier times, people found lasting identities in their cultures and communities, but these adolescent identities are based on temporary groups. If the group rejects the adolescent, the result can be devastating. When the group breaks up, as nearly all adolescent groups finally do, the adolescent is again left without an identity.

Chapter Twelve: Essential Experience #4 - Establish Their True Identity Through Grace Deposits

Establish Their True Identity Through Grace Deposits

We need to build true Identity into our kids' lives through our own words and actions and through a specially chosen Grace Team.

When Caleb and Jeremiah were small, we made an effort to visit their grandparents in Missouri whenever we could. My parents still lived on the farm, and the boys had fun exploring some of my favorite places and engaging in some of my favorite activities. Now I was especially thankful that Mom and Dad had left the inner city. I had no doubt that Caleb would have made a champion . . . tire-slasher.

My two city kids loved climbing trees. During one visit, I walked out the front door of my parents' house. Although I don't recall exactly why, I do remember that I was hunting everywhere for my sons. Finally, I spotted them both . . . about twenty feet up in a tree.

In the years since leaving the farm, I had become both a father and a city kid. I wasn't nearly as excited about my sons' tree climbing as I had been about my own bale bucking or fence building.

"Boys!" I said in my best fatherly tone. "Get down from that tree right now!"

"But, Dad." Once again, it was Caleb's little voice that reached me from the quivering limbs.

"Caleb! Jeremiah! Get down right now! Do you hear me?"

"But, Dad."

I resigned myself to one more father-son discussion. "Yes, Caleb?"

"What do we do about Grandma?"

"Grandma? What's Grandma got to do with it? Get down out of that tree right now!"

"But, Dad!" Caleb had mastered the art of persistence. "Grandma's up here, too."

I craned my neck. There, head cocked, arms and legs wrapped around a branch,

was my mother-ten feet higher up in the tree than either of my sons.

Shaking my head, I walked back inside the house, amazed at the grace deposits mom provided for those boys. She played with them, she laughed with them, she read them stories, she told them how much they meant to her because they were her grandsons. In other words, as far as Caleb and Jeremiah were concerned, mom made a point of . . . grace.

One day not long after that incident, however, mom had a massive heart attack and died. In fact, a little more than a year before, Cathy's father had become very ill, and she headed to Missouri to help care for him. For a short time, I took on her role along with my own. Usually, I had a hard enough time just being . . . Dad.

One day while Cathy was still taking care of her father, Caleb was too sick to go to school. He seemed to have those days every so often. Since we had just moved to Tulsa for my new position at First Baptist, I wasn't quite sure what to do with my ailing son. Finally, I called a friend from the church and asked for his ideas.

"Do you know Mrs. Hodges?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," I replied. Actually, I thought I knew Mrs. Hodges-but I was sorting through so many new faces and names that I was afraid to guess who she was.

"She's from the church. She recently lost her husband, so I think she may be lonely, and she's really good with kids. Why don't you give her a call? I bet she'd be glad to watch Caleb!"

I got the phone number and, desperate to get to work, decided to call Mrs. Hodges right away. She sounded nice enough, and we quickly agreed that I could drop Caleb off at her home on my way to the church.

I got the report later in the day when I called to check on my youngest son. "Oh, he started turning somersaults across the floor just a few minutes after you left. I think he's fine, Brother Walker. We've been playing games and having snacks-we even made some cookies together! That's quite a boy you and your wife have there. Quite a boy." I was used to hearing that Caleb was quite a boy . . . but Mrs. Hodges sounded much kinder than some of the other people who made that comment.

Not long afterward, Cathy's father passed away. When my mother also died, we had lost two grace-giving grandparents in a year's time, but God had a plan to keep our boys' spirit accounts from ending up in grace deficit. Our family kept seeing Mrs. Hodges here and there (by this time, we were calling her by her first name, Lucile), and she kept volunteering to keep our boys. Before long, it made sense to all of us to include her as part of the Moore family. Lucile became adopted grandma to our sons and, since I had so recently lost my mother, adopted mom to me. Through the years, she has become one of the strongest encouragers, greatest supporters, and most generous grace depositors our family has ever known. In our family's life, Lucile has always made a point of . . . grace.

