

"Some Things Kids Need"

John Dreschler has a down-to-earth little book called *Seven Things Children Need*. If ask kids what they need, I'm sure you would get a variety of answers. If you ask a child who is very young, he or she would probably say they need more toys. Our kids are grown, and even our grandkids are getting older, so I'm out of touch with what's on kids' birthday and Christmas lists. But no problem – just Google, "Popular gifts for a (*fill in the age*) year old." I Googled popular gifts for a 5 year old girl. According to the Good Housekeeping list of 30 best toys and gifts for 5 year old girl this would include Sprinkle Art Shaker. And KidiZoom Creator Cam (where you can create your own videos). Also on the list was Fingerlings, little puppets you put on your fingers. These little critters respond to sound, motion, and touch. If the kids are older, they may say they "need" a tattoo, or to get driver's license, or get their own car.

But Drescher talks about things children need that are *basic and fundamental*, necessary ingredients if children are to develop into healthy adults and contribute in positive ways to life. Using his ideas as a jumping off point, I want to point to *four things* children need as they make their journey into adulthood. The Scripture text I'm using is Ephesians 6:4 "Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction" (Good News Version).

First of all, ***Children Need Significance***. Something deep within every child and every person makes us want to be noticed - to feel like we're valued and *that we matter*. One day a group of 1st graders went on a trip to a local dairy. After they finished the tour of the facilities, the leader asked, "Are there any questions?" One of the youngsters responded by saying, "Yes, did you see my new sweater?"

This youngster was expressing the universal longing to be recognized and made to feel important. When adults have feelings of low self-esteem or inferiority this usually goes back to the early years of infancy and childhood. It's hard to live with ourselves if we feel that we're not worth much. People who see themselves as a nobody usually contribute very little to life.

*What happens if a child feels put down or lost in the shuffle? How might they try to get attention? Perhaps by *excelling*, especially to be *excessively driven* to excel and succeed. Or more often by *misbehaving* - better to be yelled at, punished, than ignored! The problem is, this pattern often continues beyond early childhood.*

What are some of the things *teenagers* do to get noticed if they feel unimportant? Smoke. Do drugs. Pester or bully people. Act loud and obnoxious. Blast their car radio at mega-decibels. Dye their hair green or orange. Dress in a provocative manner. Unfortunately, *adults* who lack a sense of significance also have their ways of drawing attention to themselves!

How can we adults help develop a healthy sense of significance in our children?

1. *Spend time with each child*. It's hard for kids to feel they are important if we don't spend quality time with them - doing things *they* like to do and want to do. Many parents give children plenty of material things, but not much of *their undivided attention and not much of themselves*.

2. *Wherever possible, praise and compliment rather than criticize.* I know, this is hard. Kids frustrate us. But where we can, be slow to point out their faults, and quick to notice good things the child does. Sincere praise helps build a feeling of significance.

Of course, be careful never to show contempt or sarcasm. I'm thinking of a Little League game I attended where one of our children were playing. The two coaches of the opposing team kept yelling insults at their 8-10 year old players when they made an error or a poor play. "You wanted to pitch, now let's see you do something!" "Well, *that* was a great play" (said in a mocking way after one of the players made an error. These poor kids just hung their heads, while the coaches were getting a kick out of this. I tell you, if it were legal to tar and feather offenders, I think these coaches were most deserving of such a punishment.

3. *We also build significance in our children when we gradually let go of them.* Our children can't feel significant as maturing adults unless we allow them to grow up. Now it's true, some parents try to make their children grow up *too soon!* Instead of allowing them to be kids, we march our teeny girls to the elementary dance in pantyhose, heels, eye shadow. We enlist 7 and 8 year olds in a constant round of baseball tournaments where the focus is on winning, winning, winning! We dress our kindergarten kids up in caps and gowns for kindergarten graduation. One little tyke commented, "I think it's bad that I graduated and can't even read."

But the other extreme is *being overprotective - too involved* in our maturing kids lives. It's hard for 14 or 16 year olds to feel significance if mom or dad won't back off and allow their kids to start to think for themselves and live their own lives apart from dad and mom. When a 3 year old says, "I want to do it myself", this is already the sign of that child's healthy desire to grow up and be his or her own person.

Kids need a sense of significance. ***Children also need emotional warmth.*** I tried to find a term that describes the need for love...acceptance...a feeling of security. I call it "emotional warmth". This "emotional warmth" is embodied in something I saw years ago. It was very simple. Our daughter was in Brownies. One day, as the girls were coming out of their Brownie meeting, one little girl came out the door, rushed up to her dad (who was a rather quiet man), put her arms around him, and said with a big smile, "Hi Daddy". I tell you, this man's got a good thing going!

When children don't *feel* loved and accepted as they are - when there isn't in the home an overriding sense of warmth and emotional security - those children easily become a problem to themselves and others.

Is your home, generally speaking, a warm and fun place to be? *What can we do to help our children feel loved and accepted on a deep level - to foster emotional warmth in the home?*

1. *Show affection.* You may say, "I'm not an emotional person." Well, get over it! We can *learn* to show affection. A study was done in a large high school in Oklahoma. Counselors in the school worked a long time to gain the confidence of 10 students whom the faculty felt were the most neglected and maladjusted. Then the team asked each of them: "How long has it been

since your parents told you they loved you?" Only one of the students remembered hearing it *at all*, and couldn't remember when! Then the counselors used the same procedure with 10 students whom the faculty felt were the best-adjusted students in the school and accepted as outstanding leaders. Without exception all of them answered that they had been assured *verbally* of their parents' love within the past 24 hours. They gave answers like, "This morning" "Last night." "Yesterday." Expressing affection with "I love you" or a hug or kiss helps create emotional warmth that fulfills a basic need in our children.

2. *We convey emotional warmth when we try to enjoy each of our children and his or her uniqueness.* If we have more than one child, chances are they're different. Honestly, it may be harder to like one than the other. But each has certain qualities that we can learn to enjoy, and affirm.

3. *We build emotional warmth when we learn to laugh together.* Question: Is mealtime a fun time, sprinkled with lightness and laughter? Or is it a solemn time when parents' closely supervise their child's eating, or air out all their gripes and complaints? My dad was a funny guy. From what he was willing to divulge, he must have been a pistol when he was a kid. When our kids were small, at times he would share some stories about his antics when he was growing up, or often do something silly. My mom would scold him, "Well, that's a good example for these children!" (and all the while our kids would be hooting and howling and having a good laugh). I wasn't worried that they would turn them into rascals like my dad. And it did create a sense of joy and warmth at our family gatherings.

4. *We also create emotional warmth when we do things together as a family.* I still cherish the annual vacations at Rehoboth Beach with our extended family.

5. *Probably the most important thing a parent can do to build emotional security and warmth in their children is to love the child's other parent!* Howard Hendricks is a noted Christian educator. He says he would rather have children raised in a home where their parents were *not Christians*, but are warmly and deeply in love, than in a home where the mom and dad are believers, but constantly bickering and fighting. He maintains that there's more of a chance for kids to develop properly and accept Christ and His love in that non-Christian home.

Kids need (1) significance (2) emotional warmth. Then add this: ***Children need discipline.*** In the real world, in real families, we know its not always love and sweetness. To say all parents need to do is to be warm and affirming towards their children is only a half-truth. Kids need *structure, boundaries, accountability.*

The text in Ephesians 6:4 tells us, "Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with *Christian discipline and instruction.*" Now I don't know of many grade-schoolers or high school kids who will thank their parents at the time they are being disciplined, or admit that this was for their good. ("Thanks, dad. I needed that!"). But studies show that at a deeper level, all kids crave *fair and consistent discipline.* They feel safer when boundaries are set, even though kids will push boundaries at times!

I certainly don't have all the answers, but here are a few thoughts on disciplining.

1. *All discipline should be done out of a desire to teach and train our children.* The word "discipline" comes from the same root as "disciple", which means student, one who learns. What happens sometimes? Parents are in a bad mood. Maybe it's been a bad day. Kids do something that sets us off. So we punish them or ground them. And it's not so much instructing our children as it is misdirecting our own frustration or anger. This is why it's a good idea when we discipline our children to at some point explain *what it is* we're trying to *teach* them through the disciplining.

2. *Discipline should be fair.* The punishment should match the crime. Kids have a way of sensing whether it's fair or not.

3. *Discipline should be consistent.* If the rules are constantly changing, kids wind up confused and insecure.

4. *Decisions about punishment should be made slowly.* Parents sometimes need to cool down before they lay on punishment in a fit of rage. Perhaps ask for an explanation from the child. Don't hastily threaten with a punishment that we're not willing to carry through.

Every parent knows that consistent, fair, loving discipline is easier to talk about than to pull off. But this is something children need if they are to mature into adults who have a healthy internal value system and a proper amount of self-control.

One more thing our children need: ***Kids need God.*** In the Ephesians passage it says fathers (parents) should bring their children up in the instruction of the Lord. Children need to be instructed in the Lord (adults do too)! It's easy for busy, earthly-minded parents to overlook the spiritual side of life, as well as the spiritual needs of their children.

The Bible puts this responsibility of spiritual training of children squarely on parents. It's not the job of schools. It's not primarily the job of the church (although we may have a part in this). The center of religious training is to be the *home and family*.

How can we help children know God?

1. *We ourselves need to know and experience God in our lives.* The starting point of helping meet our children's need of God is to satisfy own need of God! This involved turning from sin, trusting Christ as Savior, and nurturing our own inward, spiritual life.

2. *We help children find God when we teach them Biblical and spiritual truths.* God says to the Israelites: "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). We are to recite and talk about the words of the

Lord with our children! I've read that the average child asks 500,000 questions by the time he or she reaches the age of 15! If you have children, you may think that number is low! Half a million questions! And many of these can in a natural way open up an opportunity to talk about God...beliefs...values...the Bible...etc. One of the reasons adults need the church and its ministry is that the church can help *us all* learn more about God and His Word, so can be more equipped to teach our children. Of course, it goes without saying, that we teach our kids the most by *how we live, not what say!*

Now, I think I have to say that there is no guarantee that we can bring our children to God. Many dedicated Christian parents with unconverted children feel guilty, that they are a failure. But children are influenced by *many factors* - not just their parents. And God gives to everyone, including our children, the freedom to accept or reject Christ.

Sometimes all we can do is do our best to show them Christ, and turn our grown children over to God. Love them, pray for their salvation. I do believe whatever we do to teach our children of Christ is not wasted effort. Our children may come to Christ later in life, sometimes even after a concerned, praying Christian parent has gone on to glory.

There we have it...some basic needs of our children: *Kids need significance...emotional warmth...discipline...and most of all, God.*

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