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Teaching Children to Value All People

Christians share a common identity in Christ, which takes precedence over ethnicity and every other difference that tends to divide us.

Feedback



By Leslie Barner

A story recently circulated on social media about a little girl and a doll. After selecting a doll and taking it to the front of the toy store to pay, the cashier asked the girl if she was sure that was really the doll she wanted. The little girl responded with an emphatic “yes!” The cashier protested, “But she doesn’t look like you.” The little girl replied, “Yes, she does!”



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She’s a doctor, I’m a doctor! She’s a pretty girl, and I’m a pretty girl.”

The cashier saw only the difference in skin color. The little girl saw the more meaningful similarities.

The little girl got it right.

Most children do not regard outward appearances the way adults do or give credence to stereotypes. Generally speaking, children accept people who are different from themselves. But even if they don’t, they can be taught to value the dignity of all people.

The poem “Children Learn What They Live,” written by Dorothy Law Nolte in 1954, speaks to the powerful influence a child’s environment has on the way he or she treats other people. It states, for instance, that “If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.”[1] Likewise, if children live with bigotry, they learn to hate.

As parents, we should think carefully about what we are teaching our children about valuing all people, about how we are—or aren’t—modeling an attitude of love and respect toward all God’s image bearers. But let’s be honest, we can only teach our children to value all people if we value all people. And we will only truly model what we believe.

Here are some biblical truths that emphasize the value of all people. These give context for your own outlook as well as issues you want your children to understand.

God created the entire human race. Though we are a diversity of tribes, nations, languages, and families, we are *one* race with *one* common ancestor. The Bible says, “He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:25-26). Every man, woman, and child was created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:27).

God loves all people equally. Jesus didn’t come into the world to die for only one ethnic group or for certain types of people.

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He gave His life for *all*. The Bible tells us, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). God paid the ultimate price of His own Son’s life to ransom people for Himself “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

God is love. Any form of hatred, bigotry, feelings of superiority, or indifference toward others is sin. Hate is a complete contradiction of God’s character and hinders one’s ability to even know Him. First John 4:7-8 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

With a heart of humility and love, we can teach our children to value all people. Here are four things we should keep in mind as we seek to influence our children in this way:

1. See people through God’s eyes. “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Every human being, without exception, is “fearfully and wonderfully made” by God (Psalm 139:14). Appreciate the beauty of God’s diverse creation. Resist making judgments based on outward appearance, which reveals nothing about a person’s heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

2. Practice Humility. To consider oneself better than another goes against what God expects of His children. Instead, we are to consider others as better than ourselves and to care about their interests as well as our own (see Philippians 2:3-4). This means that we are to acknowledge the sinful inclination of our own souls, that we are no less a sinner in need of God’s mercy than any other. Additionally, we are to care about the interests of others, including the suffering and injustices they endure, even when we are not directly affected.

3. Reject stereotypes. It’s impossible to assign a skill, ability, or behavior to an entire group of people. There are black people who couldn’t shoot a ball through the hoop if they

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tried. And there are white people who have rhythm and some pretty great dance moves! Every ethnic group is made up of unique individuals. Get to know people for yourself.

4. Focus on the commonalities. As humans, we have more in common than we have differences. Most significantly, we are all created equally in the image of God (Genesis 1:27, 5:1, James 3:9) and we are all in desperate need of the Savior. “As it is written: None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10).

Christians share a common identity in Christ which takes precedence over ethnicity and every other difference that tends to divide us. John Piper explains, “All believers in Jesus Christ, of every ethnic group, are united to each other, not only in common humanity in the image of God, but even more, as brothers and sisters in Christ and members of the same body.” [2] Additionally, we have the same mission: to make disciples of all men (see Matthew 18-20).

God has a diverse family—by design and for His glory. We must learn to dwell together in unity (see Psalm 133:1). Pray for one another. Encourage one another. And above all, love one another. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Our children will know, too, and will live what they learn.

Feedback

[1] Children Learn What They Live, by Dorothy Law Nolte © 1954, 1975

[2] John Piper, “Foundations for Thinking about Race,” Desiring God, January 16, 1996, www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/foundations-for-thinking-about-race

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