

Developing Self-Worth in Children - Larry Coy

Introduction: Evaluating Our Parenting

The pastor began by referencing a syllabus for a seminar, highlighting a section titled "Developing a Unique Design." This section contains questions for parents to evaluate how they communicate with and treat their children. The pastor stressed that negative answers to these questions likely contribute to a poor sense of self-worth in a child.

Key Communication Pitfalls to Avoid:

- **Tone of Voice:** Do you speak your child's name with pleasure, or do you use it as a precursor to a demand or reprimand?
- **Yelling:** Do you frequently yell at your child, especially from another room? The pastor noted that children, particularly teenagers, are often in their own world and may not hear you, even after multiple attempts. This can lead to a misunderstanding where the parent assumes disobedience and the child feels unfairly attacked.
- **Assuming Disobedience:** When a parent yells from another room and is not heard, they often build up anxiety and then confront the child with anger. This can lead to falsely accusing the child of lying ("Don't tell me you didn't hear me!"). This damages trust and the child's sense of worth.
- **Lack of Eye Contact:** It is crucial to establish eye contact when speaking to your child to ensure you have their attention and to communicate love and respect.

The Foundation: Acknowledging God's Unique Design

A foundational joy in parenting is recognizing that God has made every child different. We are not meant to make one child conform to the strengths or personality of another.

- **Scripture Reference & Context:** *Proverbs 22:6* (implied) states, "Train up a child in *his* way." The pastor interprets this to mean that parents should identify the way God is uniquely molding each child and then encourage their development in those specific areas.
- **Example of Misguided Parenting:** The pastor shared the story of a man who is rebellious today because his mother was fixated on him becoming a doctor. Despite aptitude tests showing he was mechanically gifted and not

mathematically inclined, she forced him into college. He flunked out, and his life spiraled into a mess because his God-given design was ignored and rejected.

Understanding Our Children Through Spiritual Gifts

A helpful tool for understanding a child's unique design is the concept of spiritual gifts. The pastor noted this topic would be covered more deeply in an advanced seminar but provided key examples from his own family.

- **God's Design in Marriage:** The pastor first realized the importance of this by understanding his wife's gift of **showing mercy**. Her priority is how people feel and the presence of a loving atmosphere. He used to be frustrated by this, such as when she would spend hours just playing with their baby instead of "getting work done." He came to understand that this was not wrong; it was how God made her, and it was essential for the emotional well-being of their child. The rejection he felt was actually a frustration with God's design for his wife.
- **Example: The Son with the Gift of Teaching:**
 - **The Struggle:** The pastor initially struggled with his son, David. He was left-handed, uncoordinated in sports as a young boy, and seemed to cry over "nothing"—not physical injury, but relational slights or moments of frustration. The pastor worried his son was becoming a "wimp."
 - **The Revelation:** He later discovered his son's spiritual gift is **teaching**. People with this gift find joy in understanding things and become intensely frustrated when they don't. The tears were a manifestation of this frustration, not weakness.
 - **Application:** Once the pastor understood this, he changed his approach. When his son was in third grade and struggling with subtraction, he initially became frustrated by David's tears and insistence that his wrong answers were right. Realizing it was a learning frustration, the pastor sat down to explain the concept. As soon as his son understood the principle, his frustration vanished, and he completed the work perfectly. The key was to invest time and provide the necessary information.
- **Example: The Daughters with Gifts of Ruling and Mercy:**
 - **The "Ruler":** His second daughter has the gift of leadership (ruling). She naturally organizes and directs others. The pastor shared a humorous story of her, sitting closer to the TV, asking him to kill a moth, demonstrating a ruler's tendency to delegate.
 - **The "Mercy-Giver":** His youngest daughter, Karen, has the gift of **showing mercy**. At age four, she worried that kissing a guest goodnight might have hurt her father's feelings. Her primary concern was the emotional state of

others. This is a hallmark of the mercy gift. It is vital not to dismiss this as being “too sensitive” but to see it as her God-given nature.

Cooperating with God’s Design

1. **Recognize Uniqueness:** Acknowledge that God has given each child a unique appearance, unique abilities, and their own spiritual gifts.
2. **Cooperate with God:** Purpose to partner with God in developing these inward qualities.
3. **Cultivate a Sane Estimate of Abilities:** Help your child develop what the Apostle Paul calls a “sane estimate” of their abilities (as mentioned in **Romans 12**). This means knowing both their strengths and limitations. While the Bible warns against thinking too highly of ourselves, the more common problem for Christians today is an inferiority complex—a lack of confidence in God’s wisdom in how He made them.

A Practical Method: Drawing Out a Child’s Interests

The pastor shared a practical strategy he used to identify and affirm his children’s unique qualities.

- **Step 1: Ask What They Want to Be:** Starting around age five or six, he would ask his children what they wanted to be when they grew up. The specific vocation is less important than the *qualities* it represents.
- **Step 2: Identify the Underlying Qualities:**
 - **"Ballet Dancer":** When his oldest daughter, Sharon, said this, he identified qualities like grace, discipline, beauty, artistic ability, and physical stamina.
 - **"Stewardess":** This pointed to qualities of service and hospitality.
 - **"Selling things (for free)":** This revealed a heart of generosity and giving.
 - **"Stocking grocery shelves":** This showed a gift for organization.
- **Step 3: Create a Project to Express the Quality:** The goal is to give the child an opportunity to use their gift and be affirmed in it.
 - **The Stewardess Project:** When company was coming, he let Sharon act as a “stewardess,” serving napkins and drinks. When the guests left, they praised her for being a “wonderful little hostess,” which powerfully boosted her sense of worth.
 - **The Giver Project:** After a snowstorm, he and Sharon shoveled their elderly neighbor’s walk. The pastor made sure the neighbor knew Sharon did the work and affirmed her desire not to take money for it, recognizing her generous heart.

- **The Organizer Project:** He affirmed her organizational skills, noting how she meticulously folded her sweaters and kept her drawers perfectly ordered.

Conclusion: From Complaint to Calling

- **Understanding Your Child's Gift:** The pastor described his oldest daughter, Sharon, as an adult. Her desire to be a ballet dancer, stewardess, and organizer all pointed to her spiritual gift of **serving**. She is disciplined, organized, and finds deep joy in pleasing and helping people she believes in. Understanding her gift helped the pastor connect with her on her terms (e.g., doing an activity like playing tennis) rather than his (just talking).
- **Identifying God's Calling in Others:** As children become teenagers, their unique design can sometimes be expressed through what they complain about. A complaint like, "Why aren't people more friendly?" often reveals a deep, God-given concern for hospitality and connection.
- **The Church's Potential:** The pastor concluded by challenging the congregation. If every person recognized their unique calling and tithed their time (giving about 7 hours a week to ministry), the impact on the church and community would be monumental. God calls all of us to the "work of the ministry," which includes non-verbal gifts of service. This work begins when we get a good handle on our own God-given worth and design.
- **Final Encouragement:** A great way to help children develop is to expose them to positive role models and biographies of Christian leaders who have their "act together," so they can see their own aspiring qualities lived out.