

Children Are V.I.P.'s!

God Gives Them Value, Identity, Purpose

by Nancy Tichy

Once upon a time...a small girl, not yet four years old, snuggled close to her mother in the sleeping compartment of a fast moving train going north. It was more than seventy years ago when the two on the train fled from the girl's daddy and their home in Florida to follow the mother's dream of becoming an established author.

Soon, the girl's father followed the pair to Brooklyn where the little family established a home. The adult relationship was flawed and spawned frequent, bitter arguments. Many nights, the little girl lay in bed listening to angry voices in another room until a door slammed, off in the distance, and then there was silence. It was in New York that the growing child welcomed a little sister, started kindergarten and had her first encounter with snow, one magical morning. But eventually the family returned to the South and the child grew up.

Life was a hopeful blend of over-achievement in school and introverted private realities full of ambition and apprehension. But as the years rolled into decades, the woman anchored her life on three realities. God created her in love and deemed her valuable. Through faith in Christ, she could know God intimately and understand her identity in Him. By God's indwelling Spirit, she could express her faith by obedience and invest her gifts and passion in God's purpose for her life. What an adventurous ride it has been! I can witness to that, you see, for I was the little girl on the train. I am that woman!

VALUE. IDENTITY. PURPOSE. This is the heritage of every human being, God's gift to us. It is reflected even in healthy secular households. It is the framework upon which Christians build their ministry to children – with children. This is the major scaffolding upon which we base our understanding of the Bible. The Christian community – from the nuclear family to the institutions that serve its members - must acknowledge this God-given heritage. We do well to creatively, effectively build awareness of this into the lives of our children. From the beginning of human history, our loving, Creator-God expressed His love for us, pursued intimacy with us, and gathered us up to pursue His Kingdom expansion. Joyfully, we reflect His character and display His mighty works to the world around us, both seen and unseen.

In I John 4 we find the awesome declaration: God *is* love! God, the unknowable, inscrutable, beyond human comprehension, makes Himself known to us using human terms. As the Father God, He created the universe by His word, as the Beloved Son, He revealed Himself as the Word Who became flesh and dwelt among us, and as the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, He speaks words of comfort and conviction. God is **love!**

The greatest act of love ever recorded is found in the first two chapters of Genesis. When these three manifestations of an all-powerful, all-knowing, Supreme Being conferred, they **had** to speak the language of love. Here is how the writer of Genesis puts it. (Gen.1:26) "Let us make people in Our image...to be like Ourselves. They will be masters of all life...

"So God blessed them and told them to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. And it was so. Then God looked over all He had made, and He saw that it was excellent in every way." (Gen.1:28)

IT ALL BEGAN IN A GARDEN. God created Adam and then Eve to inhabit a perfect place. He assigned great **value** on the man and woman – “excellent in every way.” He gave them **identity**. As living persons “patterned after Himself - male and female He created them.” Then God blessed them and revealed the **purpose** He had for them. “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over...all the animals.” VALUE...IDENTITY...PURPOSE

That was the end of God’s direct, creative activity. Once God created the first couple, all living things carried within themselves the “seed” for passing on life. From Adam and Eve on down through succeeding generations to those of us alive in the world today, God’s purposes were hidden within that first couple. “Adam called her Eve...because she would be the mother of all people everywhere.” (Gen.3:20)

AND SO IT IS TODAY. Each person born into our world comes with God-assigned **value**, unique **identity**, and the potential for achieving the **purpose** for which God designed them. ***Our challenge is to enable children to learn this, explore what it means, and grow into their full potential.*** We must assure them that God loves them. We must help them realize who they are in Christ. We must empower them and engage them in God’s Kingdom purposes. Their response? They will worship God, enjoy healthy interaction with fellow human beings, gladly serve their Heavenly King. Love, intimacy and service. This is how our precious V.I.P.’s will grow. This is the legacy with which we have been endowed and which we must make sure our children inherit and pass on to their children.

We benefit from using visual “pegs” on which to hang these important truths. Think of a gold chain as representing the **value** our loving Creator-God places on us. A passport establishes a person’s **identity** beyond dispute. Wholesomeness in life is possible from our growing knowledge of God, each other and ourselves. A mirror and a flashlight indicate the overarching **purpose** God has for each of us: to reflect His character and display His mighty deeds. (Psalm 145) Jesus put it this way, “Let your lights so shine before mankind, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Heavenly Father,” (Matt.5:16)

SADLY, IT ALSO ENDED IN A GARDEN. You know the story well. Adam and Even were created sinless, not embarrassed by their nakedness, enjoying their work each day and relishing the daily visits with God. Who can imagine what those evening conversations were about? Knowing as they were known...secure in the Father’s love...weary, perhaps, but satisfied by the day’s accomplishments. Until....

Until Satan introduced himself and his crafty suggestion that God could not really be trusted. And so, sin entered their world. The Garden was no longer a perfect place. They had come short of God’s glory. To hide their shame, they got busy sewing fig leaves together. And, they hid from God. What poignant heartache in the questions: Where are you? Have you eaten? How could you do such a thing? With solemn finality, God pronounced the consequences of their sin. And then, He made coverings for them from animal skins. I call this “leather coat solutions to replace man-contrived coverings of fig leaves.”

Decades roll by and many generations later, God, loving the world so much, sent His only begotten Son to restore the broken relationships and open the way to know and serve Him through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. What a great demonstration of such amazing love! What great value God, the Father, places upon His Son whose unique life was one of perfect obedience. **Valued**, secure in His **identity**, completing the **purpose** given him. So is the life of Jesus recorded for us.

Now, today, we praise the Father for His great love, certain that He **values** us. We delight in our walk with Jesus, certain that He **knows** us better than we know ourselves. We listen carefully to the Spirit’s promptings, certain that we are empowered and engaged to fulfill the **purpose** for which we have been placed on this planet. I would like to suggest that all of theology, all of what Scripture reveals can be organized under these three main ideas.

Listen to these words from Ephesians. "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. So God can always point to us as examples of the incredible wealth of His favor and kindness toward us as shown in all He has done for us through Christ Jesus. For we are God's masterpiece. He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." Eph. 2:4-10 (TLB)

WHAT THEN IS OUR RESPONSE? It is clear that **we give value** to what we love, just as God does. Let me give you a very "homely" example. It was back in the early seventies and I was mothering a household that contained four children, ages four to fourteen. One spring Saturday, I decided to clean house from top to bottom, searching out corners rarely visited in our normal routines. I ended the day with some mending and as I worked the cloth through the sewing machine, I looked at my hand and realized the stone had dropped out of its setting of my engagement ring. Now, it wasn't a very big diamond, but I valued it because it represented a very special moment when Frank invited me to marry him.

A vigorous search began with everyone involved and - with no success. Sadly, I tried to accept the empty feeling that came over me every time I realized my left ring finger was missing this symbol of our love. Some days later, in a very unusual burst of cleaning energy, I decided it was the refrigerator's turn. Emptying the vegetable bins, I tipped one on its side preparing it for a good scrub and rinse, when I encountered a tiny, hard object. You guessed it! The diamond from my ring. Once rescued, it soon disappeared again. Shortly thereafter Frank presented my engagement ring to me a second time on our wedding anniversary.

All this to illustrate that our **value** flows out of the great love of God for us. And, our children experience God's love when they are convinced that we love them. Our children's confidence, their self-worth, does not flow out of themselves, but out of the solid realization that God loves them. Then they can accept their unique **identity**, confident and whole, growing in their understanding of Who Jesus is and who they are in Him. Knowing and being known.

We help equip them with God's "glorious, unlimited resources, giving them mighty, inner strength through His Holy Spirit." (Eph. 3:16) They then gladly fulfill His **purpose** for their lives. Let us be clear. **We** love and value children. **We** look for better ways to understand who they are and guide them with practical ideas about how they can fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

And let us be certain that children can understand these things - and that, at a very young age! For example, a very precious three year old in my life asked her parents one day recently, "Did you know that God gave everyone a special smile?...everyone!" You have your own favorite stories, from your experience with children that illustrate their amazing faith, wisdom and influence.

HERE'S A FINAL QUESTION. What does God want us to do to nurture our children's faith? Deut. 6:4-9 gives some practical *hooks* upon which to hang our ideas. Here we find God's plan for the family - however we want to define 'family' - and it has three main points.

One, better than any other environment, the home provides **presence**, the context for the message of God's amazing love for us. Our job is to find ways to balance "creative chaos" with orderliness. We search for meaningful symbols that help us establish a sense of God's presence.

Second, it is within the family, both intimate and extended, that we impact children by our **presentation** of God's love - how we teach them. We who mentor them must have spiritually healthy hearts, full of integrity. The way we live must reflect what we say.

Third, we must give priority to the **proclamation** of Who God is - His commands, what He commissions us to do. This comes with careful, thoughtful, intentional, insightful choices of the topics our children really need to learn and understand.

Context, conveyance, content, these three remain powerful tools in our Father's workshop for creating a healthy "next" generation. A generation that worships God, knows and serves Him and passes His legacy of **value, identity, and purpose** on to their children after them. May it be so.

Let me end this with a final story.

One very cold evening in Minnesota, I donned a beautiful, white dress and made the greatest declaration of love of my life. Publically, I pledged my loyalty to another, and declared the value of Frank's love for me. I joined him in acknowledging God's love for us both.

God there declared us one flesh, an identity not in existence before the ceremony...an entity never to be repeated. Unique. Separately, we had already put on the Father's 'leather-coat provision' to cover our sin and our shame. We grew in our intimacy with each other and with Jesus, the Lamb Who was slain that our sins might be forgiven.

For fifty years, infused and commissioned by the Holy Spirit, we labored on four continents, seeking to fulfill God's purpose for us. The journey was not without our human frailties and foibles. Admittedly we were weak, but He remained strong. Only God knows the full and final story. When the dross is burned away, may it shine forth as pure gold to the glory of God and advancement of His Kingdom on earth.

O Love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee.

I give Thee back the life I owe That in Thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be.

O light that follows all my way, I yield my flickering torch to Thee.

My heart restores its borrowed ray That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seeks me through the pain, I cannot close my heart to thee.

I trace the rainbow through the rain, and feel the promise is not vain, That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that raises up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee.

I lay in dust life's glory dear, And from the ground there blossoms red Life that shall endless be.

George Mattheson (published 1882) Psalm 13:5