

The **5** Essential
Gifts
Every
Child
Needs



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Hey, Parents (and Grandparents),

Imagine standing on the top of high hill, your son or daughter next to you, overlooking the valley below. The valley represents the life ahead of your child.

As you stand there, looking into the future, what are your hopes and dreams for your child?

- What kind of person do you want your child to grow to be?
- What kind of a woman do you want her to be?
- What kind of man do you want him to be?
- What values, what beliefs, what insights do you want to impart as your child grows?

Your child is unique. You already know that. He has his own personality. She has emerging interests and skills.

As your child grows, you have the amazing, sacred opportunity to pour your life into her. To mold and shape him. To launch your child into the future.

And you can do that, in part, by instilling in your child these five essential, sacred gifts:

1. Purpose.

Every child needs to know he is on this planet for a reason. That she is here to make a difference in the world.

Purpose, in part, is found in the unique gifts and talents of a child. No child can do everything. But every child can do something, and do it well.

Maybe your child is good at building Lego sets. Perhaps she is good at sports. Music might be a unique gift for your son. Those gifts and talents can begin to give your child a sense of purpose—a sense of why he or she is here on planet earth.

One of the ways we inspire our children to their potential is to help them recognize their gifts and talents, affirm them, and help them grow into those skills.

When I was a kid, I loved writing plays. My first real attempt at it was a huge success! It won first place in our second grade and we were able to perform it in front of the entire school. It was called, *John and the Ogre*. I still have a brown mimeographed copy of it (and since the target market of this PDF probably has no idea what *mimeograph* means, here's a [link](#)). Writing has been and is an important part of my life and purpose as an adult.

Purpose also gives a child a moral compass. It shows him what it looks like to be a good man. It gives her insights in how to be wise woman. Instilling values into our children will serve as purpose guides as they move into the world.

Ultimately, we want to help our kids discover a vision for their lives. How can they use their growing gifts and talents to make the world a better place? What are they passionate about? What in their world do they want to fix?

2. Affirmation.

Children have a primal need to know that they are loved. They have a deep-seated craving for affirmation—to know mom or dad is proud of them. When you know your parents are proud, you feel you can do anything and face anything.

My friend, John Trent, tells the following story:

Mary had grown up knowing that she was different from the other kids, and she hated it. She was born with a cleft palate and had to bear the jokes and stares of cruel children who teased her non-stop about her misshaped lip, crooked nose, and garbled speech.

With all the teasing, Mary grew up hating the fact that she was "different." She was convinced that no one, outside her family, could ever love her... until she entered Mrs. Leonard's class. Mrs. Leonard had a warm smile, a round face, and shiny brown hair. While everyone in her class liked her, Mary came to love Mrs. Leonard.

In the 1950's, it was common for teachers to give their children an annual hearing test. However, in Mary's case, in addition to her cleft palate, she was barely able to hear out of one ear. Determined not to let the other children have another "difference" to point out, she would cheat on the test each year. The "whisper test" was given by having a child walk to the classroom door, turn sideways, close one ear with a finger, and then repeat something which the teacher whispered. Mary turned her bad ear towards her teacher and pretended to cover her good ear. She knew that teachers would often say things like, "The sky is blue," or "What color are your shoes?" But not on that day. Surely, God put seven words in Mrs. Leonard's mouth that changed Mary's life forever. When the "Whisper test" came, Mary heard the words: "I wish you were my little girl."

"I love you!" "I'm proud of you!" "I so glad I'm your dad!" "I can't tell you how happy I am that you are my daughter!"

These are not words based on performance but on unconditional, unwavering love. Affirmation is the oxygen our kids need to breathe.

3. Resilience.

Resilience is the ability to adapt or recover. It's the inner strength, the grit, we want to build into our children to empower them with stamina when life gets tough—and it will get tough from time to time.

Resilience doesn't mean building up such emotional toughness that compassion and empathy get squeezed out. Resilient kids are those who, under the guidance of their parents, recognize and develop all of their mental and emotional assets and at the same time build in them the ability to keep moving forward when it would be easier to run and hide.

Dr. Michael Gurian is a passionate advocate for building resistance in our kids. He offers some practical strategies to help parents do just that:

1. *Free and organized play.* Sometimes less structure is more when it comes to building resilience. Free play encourages kids to problem-solve, an important tool in resilience-building. Too much structure robs our kids of learning how to cope when it's not always going their way.
2. *Use movies to teach resilience.* Movies about kids having to navigate life, problem-solve, and deal with emotional challenges, can offer great talking and teaching moments. (A key reminder: Use screens wisely.)
3. *Use books to teach resilience.* Books do the same. *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, and other kid-gearred books offer great stories that invite our kids to enter into the story.
4. *Help kids get dirty.* Exploring nature, getting outdoors, offers a world of resilience-building lessons.

5. *Encourage your kids to take risks.* Generally speaking, testosterone-charged boys tend to take more risks than do girls. But regardless of their sex, it's important to not only let our kids take risks but to encourage them to do so. Failure and dealing with the after effects will provide invaluable lessons for your children as they grow, as will those risks that pay off.
6. *Give your kids a job!* Sacred work builds character and resilience. When children are young, give them chores. When they reach a working age, encourage them to get a part-time job. Work always calls forth resilience in us. (From [*The Minds of Girls: A New Path for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Successful Women*](#), Dr. Michael Gurian.)

4. Self-Esteem.

While there are nuances when it comes to defining self-esteem, at its heart self-esteem is the ability to love and appreciate one's self. To recognize one's sacred worth and value. Self-esteem is the ability to feel comfortable in one's skin and not be put off when failure or disappointment or rejection strikes.

Self-esteem is forged in our children through affirmation and unconditional love. Our kids simply can't hear enough how much mom or dad loves them. How special they are. How unique they are. Self-esteem roots a child in the belief that he matters, that she matters, period. No matter what they do, no matter their successes or failure, they have worth and value because they are created in the Image of God.

The Bible calls us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Even the Bible, which is so focused on serving others, recognizes the importance and power of self-love and self-worth. It's hard to love others when we can't love ourselves.

In a social media world where comparisons with fake and doctored images is especially harmful to our girls, teaching our children to love and value themselves is an increasingly important gift.

5. Self-Respect.

Having said that, there has been a lot of push back on self-esteem as of late. The metaphor of the "participants award" and grading on effort vs outcomes have led some to suggest that our kids are growing too soft (see Resilience above) and even too self-absorbed/me-centered.

So coupled with self-esteem we will want to teach our children self-respect.

A young boy was giving himself batting practice. He tossed the ball high into the air while saying, "I'm the greatest batter of all time!" only to swing and miss. He tossed the ball high into the air a second time saying, "I'm the greatest batter of all time!" only to miss again. Then he did the same thing one more time.

After swinging and missing the third time he said, "I am the greatest pitcher of all time!"

Where self-esteem is about rooting our kids in worth and value, self-respect is about helping our kids develop a healthy understanding of who they are, especially in terms of

their strengths and weaknesses. Self-respect helps our kids know what they are good at and what they are not so good at.

In other words, we want to teach our children that, while they have great worth and value, they can't be anything they want to be. But they have the gifts and talents to build a great life; to be something; to be someone!

Think, for example, of the *American Idol syndrome*. Everyone at that audition believes that he or she has the chops to be the next American Idol. Many of those singers have been encouraged over and over again by their parents that they have it! They are star material. One problem: They can't sing!

Our kids are walking miracles! But no one child has the ability to be anything she wants to be. He can do some things well, and excel at them and build a life on them. But there are things he or she is simply not gifted to do.

Self-respect focuses on one's gifts and passions and builds a healthy life from there. Our sacred call, as parents, is to help our children see where they have potential and help them shape it, hone it, and grow it.

Don't Miss the Moments

When our first child, Alycia, was little, I was still in school. My wife, Jan, worked evenings. So while Jan was working I was able to spend time with our daughter. That included making dinner and getting her to bed (or, depending on my study load, getting her to grandma's and grandpa's house for a few hours). I wasn't much of a cook but thankfully Alycia enjoyed fried eggs and peas.

One night I decided to mix it up a bit and take her out for a gourmet meal at Burger King. I ordered a small burger and fries for her (by the way, a 6th essential gift is a healthy diet) and a Whopper and fries for me. Alycia wasn't quite talking yet.

We ate quietly for a few moments when suddenly she leaned up against me and said, "I love you!" and promptly stuffed a fry into her mouth.

May you be blessed with many of those simple, life-giving moments as you raise your child to be the good man or woman you dream for him or her to be.

[Tim Wright](#) is the Pastor of [Community of Grace Lutheran Church](#) in Peoria, AZ. He is also the co-host, along with Dr. Michael Gurian, of the [Wonder of Parenting Podcast: A Brain-Science Approach to Parenting](#). Tim and his wife, Jan, have two adult, married children and five grandchildren.