

# Three Ways to Frame Your Child's Identity

All of us come into the world with a set of genetic features that determine or at least significantly impact aspects of who we are. One doesn't have to spend much time around children to realize children, like vehicles, come with lots of different features. These features can be grouped into several categories such as talents, interests, personality, experiences and so on. The combination of these features is a significant part of what makes a person who they are and establishes what becomes known as their identity. While there are many differences between vehicles and children, let's consider a few similarities to help us think about framing up the identity of our children.

## See and Nurture Their Interests

Identity seeks to answer the question "who am I". People and vehicles come in endless sizes and shapes. Some vehicles are gifted with speed while others with strength. Vehicles can be used for purposes other than what they were designed but there is no denying a pickup pulls a trailer more easily than a car. Giving our children a strong sense of who they are designed to be and not to be and how to nurture their natural tendencies that align with God's Word can have a positive impact in their lives.

Even at a young age, children display their interests, personality, gifts, and weaknesses. Taking time to watch how they play, what each child is drawn towards and how they interact with peers is important. In doing so you will see some of the features God has weaved into their personhood (*Psalms 139:13-14*). Knowing what our children are drawn to can position us to come alongside them and nurture their strengths as well as help them recognize and grow in their areas of weakness. Considering the vehicle analogy, if a child has been designed to be a racecar, we want to help them grow into the best racecar they can be for God's glory. In similar fashion, a child who is gifted academically should be celebrated for this gift. As parents, we need to help our children see and appreciate their gifts while encouraging them to use these gifts in God honoring ways.

## Ground Their Identity

Grounding our child's identity requires teaching him or her that they have been created by God. Who we are at the core is defined not by what we do (our gifts or our weaknesses) but by our Creator. This is a very difficult thing to grasp, let alone hold onto. Most of us tend to elevate the various roles, interests, gifts, weaknesses and so on as the things that define or "identify" us. As life unfolds and loss or transition comes into play, life forces us to grapple with things like "what have I been designed for?" and "what is my purpose?". When a new vehicle is released, there is much excitement about the new features and design. However, in a short span of time, these features will be out-of-date, and parts will need to be replaced. Changing out a headlamp doesn't change the essence of a vehicle. What makes a vehicle a vehicle is much deeper than the various accessories that can and will be switched out over time.

We should not expect our children to always hold on to accurate answers to questions about the purpose of life. If most adults are honest, they do not always have proper answers to those questions either. Consciously or unconsciously, we make trivial things our ultimate pursuit. Praise God that he is faithful to expose our tendency to drift from worshiping him towards worshiping other things. God redirects our hearts and parents should expect this redirecting to also be part of their children's journey. This redirection will allow children to be better equipped to keep good, important, and fun aspects of who they are as secondary and to see those things as ways to enjoy the larger aspects of God's goodness, worship him and point others toward him. While this larger reality of appreciating God's goodness, worshiping him, and pointing towards God does not alleviate the hurt or trial of transitions and loss, it does emphasize to our children the constancy of God when life's roles, interests, and seasons of life shift. This grounding in God's constancy is vitally important for all of us.

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## Sense of Me and We

The owner of a vehicle can often tell you unique quirks their particular vehicle has. In one sense that vehicle is unique to every other vehicle because it has different features as well as different experiences than other vehicles. However, on another hand, it is a vehicle and is similar to every other vehicle. Helping our children recognize their unique features while seeing themselves as part of a group allows them to live out *1 Corinthians 12* and *13* by seeing themselves as being different from each other, yet united in the Lord and called to love. A Ford Mustang doesn't have to be a Honda Accord or vice versus, but both should follow the same traffic laws of the land that all vehicles do.

Helping our children have a good sense of who they are - meaning they recognize their God-given gifts and weaknesses - will help equip them for using their gifts in his Kingdom and to see their need for others who are different from them. They will be better prepared to navigate loss and failure. Kids will begin to see the need to ground their identity in something that will not pass - something that doesn't require giftedness or perfection but rather requires humility. As *Ecclesiastes* describes, shaping how they view God and the gifts he gives is important in identity formation. The author of *Ecclesiastes* articulates the journey of pursuing that which does not bring life. This pursuit eventually leads to the reality that knowing and following God's commands is the true purpose of life (*Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*).

The journey toward developing a healthy identity can be a painful one like it was for the author of *Ecclesiastes*. Therefore, do not lose hope if you see your child struggling in their identity. This journey requires all of us to be aware of who we are while also grounding ourselves deeper within God himself. It also asks all of us to appreciate the uniqueness we may have while understanding we are part of a larger whole. Yet as we personally frame up our own identity in a healthy fashion, we will find we are able to better encourage, form, and shape the identity of our children as well.