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Who Do Your Kids Look Like?

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Who Do Your Kids Look Like?

Abstract

"We want our children to be more and more like their heavenly Father, and as parents, teachers, and mentors, we do our part to help them grow in this way."

Posting about growing Christ-likeness in our children from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/who-do-your-kids-look-like/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Who Do Your Kids Look Like?

 allthings.org/who-do-your-kids-look-like/

Leah Zuidema

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2016

When my friend and her daughter walk together on the sidewalk ahead of me, I am struck by their matching gaits. When I share photos of my daughters and me together, people often remark how alike we look. When my friend tilts his head and thinks aloud, I am reminded of his dad.

These images are a bit like our relationship with God. On a good day, we bear a strong resemblance to our heavenly Father. People are reminded of the goodness of God through their interactions with us. You might say that we are “image bearers,” to use the language from Genesis 1:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

“Each person was made, not to be God, but to reflect “what the reality of God is like.”¹ Who is God, and what is he like? How should we look for his image in children and young adults? What does that mean for our parenting, our teaching, and our interactions with kids in our neighborhoods and congregations, whether those kids are well known to us or unfamiliar faces?

These are big questions. We want our children to be more and more like their heavenly Father, and as parents, teachers, and mentors, we do our part to help them grow in this way. Education professor Donovan Graham observes that in our finite and limited way, all people—even the young among us—reflect God’s nature. As image bearers, children and young adults are created to be active and purposeful, rational and thinking, creative, moral, just and righteous, free and responsible, and faithful. They are also created to reflect God’s relational nature—to be social, loving, and merciful. But because all struggle with sin, the image displayed in each one is distorted and falls short of God’s true glory.²

So That...

The Bible is clear about why we have been created to reflect God’s nature. We are much more than walking mirrors. The “so that” appears right in Genesis 1:26-27: God created people as image bearers so that we may rule over the world he has placed us in. We do so as God’s representatives, ultimately pointing people back to the divine King:

Ancient Near Eastern cultures saw their rulers as “images” or representatives of their gods. Common folk, foreigners, and enemies need not apply; it was kings who were the divine image. Genesis 1 presents a different scenario. All human beings, male and female, are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). All have dignity and value.³

All human beings—kids, too! By God’s good design, each person is an image bearer from day one. Though sin may tarnish or dim the reflection of God’s nature, his image always remains. Each person has “the vocation and capacity—by God’s grace—to grow in divine likeness.”⁴ Kids, too, are youthful image bearers, growing into their potential and their responsibilities as God’s representatives.

That’s a lofty vision for who our kids should look like. It essentially spotlights how big a responsibility we have for educating them well. To train them up in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6), we’re going to need to do much better than lecturing them at home, or drilling them with rote memorization and worksheets at school or in church education. They need us to see their potential, challenge them with high expectations, provide practice in real

situations, and guide them by thinking aloud together as they learn through trial and error. They need us to name to them how they are called to be God's representatives, to look like their heavenly Father.

Caring, Creative, Curious

The following are some of the most dangerous phrases I know:

"Kids these days just don't care."

"He's not very creative. Oh well, what can you do?"

"She isn't really very curious. Let's stick with the basics."

I can empathize—there are times when I've caught myself also starting to nod in agreement. But these are destructive words, and we need to guard vigilantly against them. These words should offend us so deeply that we want to stand up and shout when we hear them—or sit down and pray for forgiveness when we say them.

But what's the big deal?

When we settle for seeing any young person as essentially lacking in care, creativity, or curiosity, we reduce them to something less than God has created them to be. We forget the heart of who they are, who God made them to be: each child, each student, each young neighbor or church member, was created in God's image, to be his representative. Each was designed by the same God who made the universe, each knit together in ways that only God could understand, shaped with intricacies and marvels by the holy King of Kings (Psalm 139).

Make no mistake: God cares deeply about all that he has created, and he made his children to care, too. When we hear (or are tempted to say) that "Kids these days just don't care" or "aren't creative" or "lack curiosity," we should look to remove whatever is hindering them from living as the image bearers that they were created to be. We should not assume that this attitude is just how kids are naturally. Though each has been tarnished by sin, each was designed to care about the human and non-human creation; to engage creatively in work and culture; and to delight in continually seeking to know more—showing curiosity as they learn about God and his world.⁵

As parents, teachers, and mentors to the young people around us, we need to help them develop more fully into who God is calling them to be. We should love children unconditionally—and love them so much that we do the hard work of helping them to keep growing as image bearers in the process.

Footnotes

1. Graham, Donovan L. *Teaching Redemptively: Bringing Grace and Truth into Your Classroom*. 2nd edition. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design, 2009. Page 74. [↩](#)
2. Graham, Donovan L. *Teaching Redemptively: Bringing Grace and Truth into Your Classroom*. 2nd edition. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design, 2009. Chapters 8-11. [↩](#)
3. Smith, David I. and Pennylyn Dykstra-Pruim. *Christians and Cultural Difference*. Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College, 2016. [↩](#)
4. Groome, Thomas. *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*. New York: The Crossroad, 2001. Page 77. [↩](#)
5. Hulst, John B. "Christian Education and Creativity." In *Christian Education Issues of the Day*. Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College, 2012. Pages 139-150. [↩](#)