

Faith



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

Raise the child you have, not the child you want

I have a friend who found out her daughter had cancer after a visit with her 2-year-old’s pediatrician. Her daughter’s blood work was off, and this led to more testing and a diagnosis.

Her daughter is doing great now, and last year we celebrated her five-year remission. But one thing that’s always stuck with me was a realization my friend had shortly after learning about the cancer.

She told me that when her daughter was a toddler, her spirit and spunky personality could drive her up the wall sometimes. She wanted her to be calm and easy.

But after the diagnosis, she realized God made her tough for a reason. He gave her a special armor on purpose, because He knew she’d need it to handle the grueling and aggressive treatments she’d face to fight cancer at a young age.

I often think of this story as I raise my kids and watch other kids grow up. Like most parents, I came into parenting with pre-conceived notions. I projected into the future and fantasized about who my kids would become and how blindingly perfect they’d be.

In some ways, I envisioned them as my second chance. I secretly hoped they’d be like me, only smarter and more talented, so I could be their mentor and put my life experiences to good use.

But guess what? Not one child is my mini-me, and that’s a good thing. My girls are all authentic and wired their own way, and while I certainly relate to parts of their personalities and see myself in them all the time, I also recognize

enough differences to understand how their life is not my do-over.

Forcing my dreams and ideas on them would never work, because their destiny has nothing to do with mine.

I once heard advice on the radio to “raise the child you have, not the child you want.” The words hit me hard because at the time, I was trying to mold my children to match the idealized visions in my head. I made the mistake many parents make by failing to consider their natural and God-ordained bent.

Obviously, we parents are responsible for helping our children become responsible citizens. We’re called to correct poor behavior, maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses and model moral excellence. But if we want our children discover their best life possible — a life filled with purpose and passion — we also have to respect their inherent design. This means training them in a direction that allows them to be true to themselves and who God made them to be.

God made no mistakes in creating our kids. He did it with great attention and intention. None of us know yet how God is planning to use our kids, or what He may be equipping them for in the future. A trait that seems like a flaw can be a lifesaver in certain situations. A trial that seems like a burden can seem like as a blessing when all is said and done.

A strong-willed girl who isn’t afraid of challenges and arguments, for instance, may be

exactly what her peers need when an injustice arises, and they need a brave leader to take charge.

A sensitive boy who barely speaks a word may become a prolific artist who eloquently expresses those deep human emotions that help people connect and feel less alone.

A girl who doesn’t make the basketball team five years in a row may become a rock star entrepreneur who later credits her failures in helping her develop the fortitude and perseverance she’d need to go the distance.

And a boy who stutters and struggles with speech may develop an unbelievable work ethic that makes him try harder than everyone, never give up on himself, and ultimately reach a position of influence where he can help kids who face his former struggles.

The point is, there is no “one right way” a child should be. God created each child to carry out a special mission. Only time will tell what their mission is.

And if you think about it, good parenting is largely about preparing our kids for their mission. It’s about forgetting our fantasies, becoming a student of our children, and seeing God as the authority of their life, choosing to work with His plan rather than against it.

It takes every personality under the sun to make the world go ’round. We need kids who are gentle, passionate, quiet, spunky, fearless, driven, outspoken, observant, funny, practical, reserved and bold. We need social butterflies,

bookworms, worker bees, wallflowers, steel magnolias and firecrackers. We need survivors, old souls, free spirits, athletes, tough cookies, geniuses and late bloomers.

And despite any differences we notice among kids, there’s one term that applies across the board: world changer. Every child is meant to be a world changer. And every child deserves the right to change the world by being who they are, not who others want them to be.

It’s a pivotal moment when we parents learn to respect and celebrate our kids’ personalities without wishing for them to change. Whether this moment comes immediately or after an epiphany like my friend had, it’s good to remember how we all have the tendency to try and convert and control certain qualities in our kids that aren’t meant to be converted or controlled.

Giving our children the permission to be themselves makes them happier and us happier, too. It leaves room for God to work in our children’s lives and pleasantly surprise us as we see His plan unfold and understand how His design for them fits perfectly with that plan.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mtn. Brook mom of four girls, columnist, and blogger for The Huffington Post. Her first book, “10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know,” is now available on Amazon and everywhere books are sold. Join her Facebook community at “Kari Kampakis, Writer”, visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.

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