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The Presbyterian Record ceased publication in December 2016

If You're Raising Girls, Don't Make This Mistake

April 2, 2014 Matthew Ruttan



I've been doing a lot of reading on parenting these days. Makes sense—not only do I care about families, but I'm a dad to 3 small kids.

2 girls, 1 boy.

And a lot of my reading is actually on the boy side because of a great book I picked up on what neuroscience and the Bible say about what your boy needs to thrive. (Blog forthcoming.)

But something I've encountered many times relates to girls and is worth sharing:

Don't make their looks the default way you affirm them.

I have to watch myself too. “Honey, you look so beautiful.” “That's so cute.” “Sweetie, you are so pretty.” When our default praise has to do with looks, it tells the child that the thing that makes them special or important is, well... their looks.

I think that boys get default praise too. Listen to the way you talk to you kids, and to your boys: “You're strong.” “You're so smart.” (There are different issues on the male side.)

But what if we made a habit of affirming girls for their intellect, and strength, and faith?

Developmental psychologists tell us that there is a kind of internalized parent (a “voice”) within us which is a guide to moral behaviour and also a kind of critic. In most people, this voice is in full swing by the time a child is 4. It then can work as a moral compass.

In a wise and liberating (New York Times Bestselling) book called *Women, Food and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*, Geneen Roth recalls an article by Courtney E. Martin: “So many perfect girls were raised entirely without organized religion, and the majority of the rest of us experienced ‘spirituality’ only in the form of mandatory holiday services with a big-haired grandmother... Overlay our dearth of spiritual exploration with our excess of training in ambition... and you have a generation of godless girls... raised largely without a fundamental sense of divinity. In fact, our worth in the world has always been tied to our looks... not the amazing miracle of existence.”

Take a walk through the mall looking at the ads and posters and fashions and tell me what a 4-year-old girl simply strolling around might think of what makes a woman ‘good’ simply based on what they see?

Compound that by what they're told in their own home.

I wonder: How the affirmation we give our girls going to help (or hinder) them in life's journey? What is their internal “voice” telling them? Where is their value?

Let's make it about more than looks. Faithful. Smart. Strong. Kind-hearted. Beautiful yes, but in a more holistic way.

The last word is with poet Galway Kinnell: “sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness.”

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About Matthew Ruttan

Matthew Ruttan is a simplifier, disciple, husband, dad, singer, blogger and pastor at [Westminster in Barrie, Ont.](#) "A pulse doesn't mean we're alive." Receive his daily email devotional [here](#) One day he hopes to own a rowboat. [Subscribe to this blog.](#)



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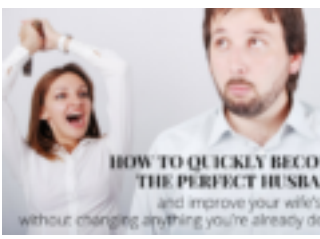
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