

## **Book Review**

### *Grace-Based Parenting*

**Tim Kimmel**

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In his book *Grace-Based Parenting*, author and speaker Tim Kimmel offers a “new” model for parenting rooted in the ancient biblical principle of grace. Kimmel has done a phenomenal job of what British theologian John R. W. Stott calls “double listening”—one ear listening to God’s Word and the other to God’s World.” The author argues that “the bottom line of parenting is grace” and that by reaching back to this most distinguishing characteristic about the Christian faith, modern parents can meet the deepest needs of their children’s hearts while equipping them to shine as “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation” (Philippians 2:14–15 NIV). Both entertaining and insightful, this book is one to be treasured as a model not only of parenting but also of living as a Christian.

*Grace-Based Parenting* is introduced as an “adventure” in parenting. After a brief critique of the many parenting styles used in today’s Christian homes, Kimmel offers a “radical way to parent,” which he has broken down into two main parts: the goal of parenting efforts and the delivery system of those efforts. The goal is outlined as meeting the “fundamental inner needs that your child was born with.” The first half of the book thus explains three inner needs: the

need for security, the need for significance, and the need for strength. The second half of the book details how to meet those needs in the context of daily life within a family. Kimmel’s delivery system is based on four freedoms necessary for the spiritual growth and maturity of children: the freedom to be different, to be vulnerable, to be candid, and to make mistakes.

The organization of the text is rather complex and can seem somewhat overwhelming. The two-part structure of the goal and the delivery of parenting efforts becomes a matrix with multiple themes that are inextricably interwoven. This challenges even the most skillful reader to pull together several complex ideas into one less-than-simple “solution” to the parenting puzzle. Perhaps this is an intentional reminder that parenting is an incredibly complex undertaking. Nevertheless, while the formula may be difficult to remember, the dynamic message is impossible to forget.

By and large, Kimmel’s book is an inspiring and practical look into the biblical truths that apply to parenting. The author does an incredible job of speaking to the heart of his audience with vulnerability, sharing both his successes and his failures as a parent. In

addition, Kimmel's main claim, that true grace produces families who aren't afraid, makes this book well worth the read. He boldly calls on parents to stop making decisions based on fear and to start teaching their children to appropriate the power of God in the midst of struggles. His admonition that Christian parents and children should learn to embrace the culture that lives in darkness while themselves remaining in the light is a timely and necessary one. In a memorable highlight of the book, Kimmel encourages parents to trust in the God of the universe as they go out to the most dangerous places on the globe, "taking their faith to the lost and hurting people who live at 'street level.'"

Entwined with the main theme of courageous grace, Kimmel offers much wisdom to parents. "The Freedom to be Different" is perhaps one of the best chapters in the book. Kimmel's advice comes in the form of a story about a mother who transmitted her fear of jack-o'-lanterns to her children, creating an idol out of a carved vegetable. Perhaps parents can find freedom in the author's call to loosen up and trust in God. Kimmel offers a needed reminder that fear has no place in a Christian's life, and we indeed miss the mark in choosing to "affix evil power to things or actions that are just things and actions." His advice is straight from the Bible, encouraging readers to look not at outward things but to look at the heart.

The strengths in *Grace-Based Parenting* are many. Kimmel's insistence that parents must focus on their own spiritual maturity in Christ is welcome wisdom. He rightly argues that to offer children radical love based on grace, parents must daily experience such unconditional love

from their heavenly Father. Another welcome feature of the book is that Kimmel never makes light of the serious job of parenting. Awakened parents to the reality of spiritual warfare, the author insists that prayer is essential and the enemy is real as parents strive to offer their children a tangible glimpse of God through daily provision, love, and discipline. Kimmel also wisely leaves much room for differences in individual parenting styles, insisting that God is "an original God who wants to have an original relationship with you and your children" (p. 21). Furthermore, by deeming affection vital in the parent-child relationship, the author challenges parents to reach out and love their children in appropriate physical ways, in a radical and Christ-centered break from today's "touch free" culture.

My criticism of the book is minimal, but readers should prepare themselves for some challenges before embarking on the "parenting adventure" with Kimmel. The author comes across a bit harshly in the beginning of the book. His slightly insensitive criticism of other parenting styles requires any parent to show an incredible amount of humility in admitting any of the mistakes Kimmel points out. In addition, the author often makes statements that any parent could find overwhelming. For example, Kimmel states that those who practice grace-based parenting focus on "keeping their children balanced with it comes to their faith, integrity, poise, discipline, endurance and courage" (p.212). Remarks such as this can leave the reader feeling helpless rather than empowered. Nevertheless, wise readers will realize that grace-based parenting will lead them to constant and rightful dependence on God.

*Grace-Based Parenting* is powerful and effective, calling parents to place their relationship with God first, to shower their children with blessing and affection, to realize that God is an individual God, and to constantly communicate acceptance and love to

their children. The book is certainly worthy of consideration by any parent and indeed any Christian. The reader will come away knowing that God is a God of forgiveness rather than fear, loving discipline rather than meaningless rules, and unconditional love rather than conditional acceptance.