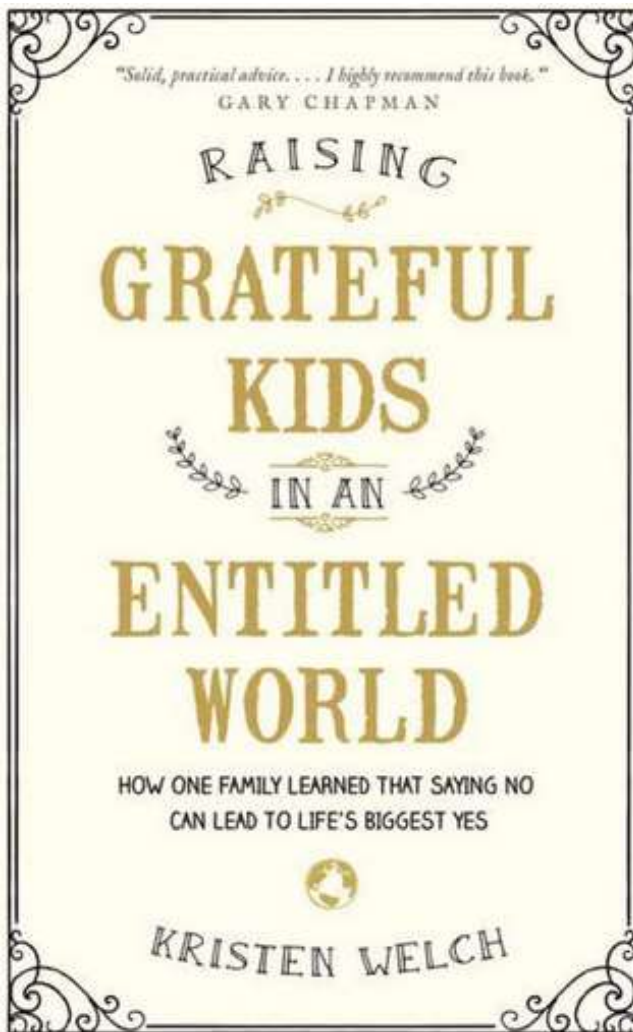


PARENTING TIPS

‘Raising Grateful Kids’ could be helpful

Posted: Sunday, April 3, 2016

“Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World: How One Family Learned That Saying No Can Lead to Life’s Biggest Yes” by Kristen Welch. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016, 272 pages, \$15.99.



“Anytime we step out of the mainstream and try to turn our lives (or homes) around and dare to go upstream, it’s hard,” Kristen Welch laments near the beginning of “Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World: How One Family Learned That Saying No Can Lead to Life’s Biggest Yes,” her latest foray into the challenges of being a parent in the new millennium. “Some would say impossible. The journey is filled with obstacles, naysayers and discouragers. And then there are the children. Starting from preschool, our kids are taught conformity – to be like everyone else, to follow rules and not misstep. It’s in our human makeup to want to fit in, to not stick out or be different, to blend in.”

From the onset, it’s obvious this is a religious book designed to help Christian parents approach childrearing from a biblical perspective. The volume is saturated with references to the Scriptures as Welch attempts to explain why many of the youngest members of our society seem to have a distinctly self-centered perspective. As might be expected given her background and ideological orientation, she tends to see events and other phenomena through a relatively narrow neo-conservative lens. And within the context of her particular vantage point, there is certainly an

undeniable coherency to her prose; everything she proposes as a remedy for saving the current generation from themselves makes perfect sense if you first buy into her initial premise. Indeed, she is superbly unapologetic for her stance on a number of social issues that some of the more “enlightened” might consider a little backward and even naïve.

Welch’s literary style is a combination of keen observation, deep personal introspection, astute interpretation within a biblical context and an engaging synthesis that often results in an alternative way of understanding and responding to adolescent behaviors. Many of her suggestions will no doubt be perplexing to those who do not fully appreciate the worldview of our younger

counterparts. At some point, every generation loses touch with the realities faced by those who will eventually replace them in the never-ending procession of life and culture. Although this has been true for all previous generations, there does seem to be something uniquely idiosyncratic about today's teenagers. They are the first cohort to come of age completely submerged in a technologically-driven universe where even what it means to be human seems to be constantly evolving.

At the same time, some rites of passage have remained remarkably stable through the decades. See if you can relate to this anecdote from "Seven Ways We Parents Miss the Boat (and How to Get on Board)," the third chapter and one of my favorites: "When I was in sixth grade, I remember I wanted a pair of Guess jeans more than I wanted my mom to stop giving me home perms. Jeans were status. They were the key to fitting in at school, or so I thought. I begged and pleaded, but my parents wouldn't – and probably couldn't – fork over the \$50 to make me happy. Instead my mom bought me an off-brand look-alike pair, with a similar triangle patch on the back pocket. But instead of the word 'Guess' on the patch, my knockoff pair had the word 'Tropics.' So I did what every 12-year-old girl does – I took a Sharpie marker and wrote Guess over Tropics, which looked just as bad as you'd imagine. My mom made me wear them until I outgrew them."

"Raising Grateful Kids" is extensively researched, with nine pages of source notes and a discussion guide at the conclusion of the introduction, 10 chapters and three appendices that comprise the main text. The author is obviously a parent writing for parents; the practical insights and pragmatic advice presented in this exquisite primer could not have been written by someone who did not have an intimate knowledge of the subject matter. I could not help but smile when I got to Appendix A, "Cell Phone Contract between Parent and Child," which deals with a concern most of us who have children have had to confront more than once. Moreover, as a student of human nature, I found much of the research Welch cites in the book to be intriguing.

"When Americans were asked by the Barna Research Group if absolute truth exists, more surprising than the results was how much and how quickly the results changed in just a few years," Welch explains in "Times Have Certainly Changed," the second chapter and one I also found to be especially fascinating. "In 1995, 50 percent of born-again Christians said there were moral truths that are unchanging, and that truth is absolute, not relative to the circumstances. In 2000, another poll showed that the number of respondents who agreed with those statements was up to 53 percent. Again, the same question was asked in 2009 and 2015, and the survey found that 46 percent believe that moral truth is absolute. The same research group found that among teenagers, 83 percent said moral truth depends on situational truth."

Welch lives in Texas with her husband and three children. A few years ago, she started a blog (www.wearethatfamily.com) about the trials and tribulations of trying to raise Christian children in the modern era; she currently has more than 70,000 followers. Her previous books include "Saying Yes to God As a Family: 30 Lessons for the Table from Rhinestone Jesus," "Don't Make Me Come Up There!: Quiet Moments for Busy Moms" and "Deep Roots: Defining the Sacred Through the Voices of Pentecostal Women Preachers."

One of the endearing features I enjoyed about "Raising Grateful Kids" is the honesty with which Welch approached the subject at hand. She is not afraid to admit when she has been wrong – but she always seems to learn from her failures and is determined to help others avoid those same mistakes if possible. If you have kids, this one could be a potentially useful addition to your parenting arsenal. You might want to pick up a copy.

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