



## Loving the Differences

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

A friend once admitted that his two children were so different from each other that he actually found it difficult to “like” both of them equally. He discovered his tendency was to favor the child who was more like him. One day, however, he realized the Lord had given him just the children he needed to help him in becoming conformed to the image of Christ. He realized that part of making that happen was learning to understand and appreciate his children for the unique individuals they were.

Gail MacDonald<sup>1</sup> tells of a meticulous mother who had a “sloppy son.” After years of battling with him over his messy room and lifestyle, she finally admitted that there was nothing morally wrong with his behavior. Yes, every child must learn some degree of self-discipline and order; but a neat person is not morally superior to a messy one. Once she realized this about herself and her son, that he was more interested in other things, she was better able to enjoy him, help him with his weaknesses, and capitalize on his strengths.

A child who is very unlike us in personality is often a puzzle. We may ask ourselves, “Why is this child doing this?” “Is this defiant behavior or simply a difference in personality?” Gail suggests there are four questions we can ask ourselves to help understand and celebrate our children’s differences.

First ask, What energizes my child? Does he love being where the action is, preferring to play with others, or

is he more likely to be alone? While both my children enjoyed others and had important friendships growing up, our son brought all his buddies home, and there was always lots of action (and food eaten). Our daughter, on the other hand, looked to home as a place to re-energize herself. Recognizing these needs, without making value judgments, gives our children the freedom to be who they are meant to be.

The second question is, How does my child take in information? Some children rely heavily on their five senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. These children pay attention and are observant. Others rely more on their intuition. They are less likely to care about details, liking to daydream and use their imaginations. More intuitive children need a great deal of affirmation and require more patience. Caring about details doesn’t come naturally for them. However, these intuitive children can delight you with their imagination and creativity.

The third question is, How does my child make decisions? The thinking child can drive you crazy with “why” questions. Rules are important to them, and they will be the first to notice when someone else has broken a rule. The more feeling child tends to take things more personally, and feelings are easily hurt. Harmonious relationships are important to them.

The ways our children make decisions give us a clue to the fourth question, How does my child relate to the outside world? Some have strong opinions, like to make choices, are more orderly, and thrive on schedules and plans. They need to know what’s happening and need help in making good decisions. Others are slower in making decisions, and they tend to procrastinate. We need to help them gather information and encourage them without putting a value judgment on their approach to life.

I invite you to pray that God will help you see your children through the eyes of Christ, seeing them as irreplaceable, likable, and unique!

<sup>1</sup> Gail McDonald, *Parenting: Questions Women Ask*, (Multnomah Press, 1992).

