

“Brilliant, well-researched, laugh-out-loud funny and empowering. Ed Drew is the perfect companion (ally, teacher, confidante and friend) for the crazy roller coaster that we call parenting.”

JONTY AND LINDA ALLCOCK, The Globe Church, London

“Our children are growing up in a very different world to the one we grew up in, and there are certain conversations we can dread as parents! Thank you, Ed, for this book and for not shying away from the hot topics but offering practical insights on how parents can navigate the big questions of the day.”

ANDY FROST, Share Jesus International

“It’s been said that parenthood is sanctifying. I would add that it is also often downright paralyzing. Of course, it’s one of life’s greatest joys too. We who are parents and also Christ-followers want to get it just right. Ed Drew writes as a friend, a fellow parent and an experienced youth minister, who clearly loves Jesus and loves kids. This book is chock-full of anecdotes and practical ideas, of Scripture and reminders of God’s character, and of grace and truth. I’m so glad to have read it, and I heartily recommend it to all parents and anyone who loves children and teens.”

JEN OSHMAN, Author, *Welcome; Cultural Counterfeits*; and *Enough about Me*

“No Christian should be allowed to have children without first being inspired and equipped by this wonderfully realistic and practical book!”

ED SHAW, Ministry Director, livingout.org; Author, *Purposeful Sexuality*

“This book is a must-read for every parent wanting to parent their child to navigate this life in light of eternity. Ed tackles some of the most pressing issues that parents face today with biblical insight and wisdom, and humour along the way. You may not agree with everything written in this book, but this book will prepare every parent to address pressing issues such as identity, friendships, gender, sexuality and marriage, with their child.”

SANDY GALEA, Kidswise Director, Fellowship Dubai

“In this helpful book, Ed bares his heart’s desire that children (not only his own) should learn that ‘in God we have an unshifting solid and secure foundation on which to build our lives’. With helpful anecdotes, he supports parents as they deal with some of the issues of identity that children and especially teenagers face in our current fast-changing culture. By taking every opportunity for communication with our children, we are encouraged to show that, as Ed says, they are ‘made by a great God and loved by a great Saviour’.”

DR LIZ JONES, Lovewise; Author, *Growing Up God’s Way*;
Retired Paediatrician

“There are so many reasons to love this book. It takes complicated Bible truths and applies them to the nitty-gritty of everyday parenting. It tackles the hardest and most confusing contemporary challenges and responds with measured, biblical wisdom. Filled with real-life stories that are told with insight and compassion (and much delightful humour), Ed Drew’s book is for parents who want to help their children build an identity in which confidence is rooted not in themselves but in the God who created them and the Saviour who came to redeem them.”

STEVE MIDGLEY, Executive Director, Biblical Counselling UK;
Author, *Mental Health and Your Church*

“Highly readable, this book is biblical but also honest about the modern challenges to modern parents. It is encouraging, challenging and comforting. It deals with godly and wise principles rather than detailed practical tips, and the chapters on gender and sexuality are a must.”

DEBBIE HARDYMAN, Missionary; Special-Needs Dentist

“This book has achieved the rare thing of genuinely impacting my day-to-day practice as a parent. Ed Drew well illustrates the need in this cultural moment for parenting that moves beyond our basic protective instincts to build Christ-centred confidence and resilience in our kids. The gospel offers children resources and power to navigate the inevitable suffering and confusion that life holds—our parenting can bear witness to this!”

RACHEL WILSON, Author, *The Life We Never Expected*

“This book offers parents a perfect (and rare) combination of biblical philosophy and present day practicality. Ed Drew relays the truth of Scripture in a way that filled my heart with affection for Christ, compassion for my children and gratitude for my own identity. He addresses the issues facing today’s kids with specificity, delicacy, courage and confidence, and he has left me feeling equipped to do the same. I laughed, cried, and whispered sincere thank-yous as I read. Words from this book are already taped to my mirror, shaping my responses to my kids and permeating my conversations with friends. I will return to its wisdom again and again.”

ABBEY WEDGEWORTH, Author, the *Training Young Hearts* series and *Held*

RAISING CONFIDENT KIDS

in a Confusing World

ED DREW

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COMPANY

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wisdom, patience and inspiration.*

The brilliance is theirs. The mistakes are all my own.

www.faithinkids.org

for more resources on identity for children and families

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If you're reading this and you are American, I have a confession to make: I'm British. Which means (among other things) that I grew up with a mum not a mom, changed nappies and not diapers when my kids were little, and talk about secondary school and not high school. I am sure that in the pages that follow, there will be a heap of spellings that look wrong to you, some phrases that sound a bit unfamiliar, and a few places where you'll need to translate a bit for your own context. But I'm also sure that our cultures are, in the main, not very dissimilar, that children are children wherever you live, and that the gospel is wonderful and can help and inform all our parenting.

So, every time you come across something that sounds odd, I apologise—I mean, apologize. Because saying sorry is one thing that British people excel at.



1

THIS IS ME

There are only three certainties in life: death, taxes and pictures on social media of children standing on their doorstep at the start of each new school year. My wife can't help herself. She will line our three kids up in height order, seeking to recreate the same pose she's taken every year for six years. She will ask for smiles. My daughter, aged 15, will *choose* to smile. Easy. My older son, 12, now understands that smiling will make his mother happy. That's progress. My younger son, 8, usually needs paying with a large quantity of chocolate to force a smile out of him. Some years he responds to pleading.

For our family, the whole thing is a ritual—predictable, inevitable and reassuring. A year older. A year taller. It is a snapshot of a moment in the story of our family. It is the photo we share because it is another milestone, it has the sparkly sheen of a happy family and it speaks of hope at the start of another year. This is the picture of our family that we want everyone to see. This is us. Isn't it?

JUST A DAD IN CARGO SHORTS

All of us are constantly, if not consciously, answering the question: who am I? It's the question of identity. We approach the question in different ways and come up with different answers. But it's there for all of us. Your kids are answering it. And so are you.

Personally, I have for years been proud of being a man who doesn't go in for brands or logos and who dresses unconventionally because I'm confident in being me. I think of myself as a man who stands bravely in the face of the marketing monster. I defy description. I occupy a space outside of fashion. In this sense, I am what I wear (to steal the title of a UK TV show from a couple of decades ago). My cargo shorts tell you that I am a free man. This is me!

But a few years ago I went to a U2 stadium concert. The day after, a meme went around entitled "Seating plan for U2's performance". Different areas of the stadium seating were shaded different colours, with a key underneath. Some seats were marked as "IT managers on a team-bonding offsite trip"; others as "People calling their babysitter to ask them for another two hours". I checked where I had sat. The label for my area said, "Dads in cargo shorts". I thought back. I had been wearing cargo shorts. Turns out I do not defy convention. I am the stereotype of a middle-aged man who *thinks* he defies convention.

I want to be unique. I want to be different. I want to baffle categories and conventions. But really, I don't. Who am I? I heard recently of a teenager saying to a teacher who she trusted that she didn't know who she was. She had

realised that she was a totally different person depending on whether she was with her parents or with one group of friends or another group. “Who am I?” she asked. *Which is the real me?* How can she tell?

I know several children who seem to have no friends at school. I know as a parent how it feels to ache with your child as they explain what it’s like to wander around the playground alone. I remember the first child I knew who felt like that. She was 8 years old, and I thought she was a great 8-year-old. If I’d been 8, I’d have wanted to be her friend. But it turned out that all the real 8-year-olds she knew did not see it like that. I remember thinking, when I was told about her experience, “What? But she is the loveliest child! Why doesn’t everyone want to be her friend?” Is this who she is? Lonely. Friendless. Isolated.

That girl is now in her mid 20s. The last time I heard, she was visiting New York with friends. Is she still the same person? Is she defined by how many friends she had aged 8? Is she worth more now that she has tons of friends?

THIS IS ME?

There is an incredibly powerful song in the movie *The Greatest Showman* called, “This is me.” It is sung by the cast of Barnum’s Circus. Audiences come to see them because each is in some way a “freak”, but together they are a tight-knit family. Against the finger-pointing and the pity, they sing together “This is me”. Their lives have been defined by rejection because of what they look like, whether it be their extreme height (or lack of it), their impressive beard

(on a woman), their birthmarks or their tattoos. They sing their story: “Hide away, they say, because we don’t want your broken parts. Run away, they say, no one will love you as you are.”

They are defined by what they look like. Their value can be measured by the money they bring in. They are known by their defining feature—“The bearded lady” and “dwarf man” and so on. This is who they are. At least, that is what others say.

But they sing a different story. They sing of being brave as well as bruised. They sing of marching to the beat that they themselves are banging out. They sing of making no apologies for who they are. It is their angry answer to the question “Who are you?” They refuse to be the labels others give them. While they might be bruised and hurt by how they have been treated, they know that they are more than a physical quirk or an outlier from the norm.

There’s something wonderful about that. There’s something here that we want our own kids to emulate: to refuse to be defined by how others view them or treat them. And yet, there’s something dangerous here too.

There is a spirit of our age that tells our children to give their own angry answer. Our children are being asked to start from a blank sheet of paper. Who are you? Who do you want to be? What is your gender? What is your sexuality? Where is your value? How will you be famous? What difference will you make? Follow your own path. Create your own path. Follow your heart. Be the person you want to be. Stand up and declare, without apology, “This is me”.

That is not freedom, though. That is a burden. Not only that, it is shifting. What if the me I am today is not the me I was yesterday? What if I don't much like the me I am today? What if what I think and how I feel don't match up at the moment? What if the me I want to be causes hurt to the you you want to be? Creating your own identity is elusive, and it is exhausting. It leads away from confidence and towards crisis.

That spirit of the age sounds so appealing. It may even seem loving. But it is not true. Our children's hearts are at risk. We might feel overwhelmed, confused and tempted to just give in. On the other hand, we might feel fearful and hear ourselves responding negatively to the world's message by pointing out to our kids at every single opportunity—as it comes through the words of their teachers, their friends and themselves—where it is wrong. But we have a better story to tell: one of redemption, hope and purpose. We have the best, most uplifting story to give to our children.

A CONFIDENT SHEEP

The better story is that they have been created in their Maker's image. Their loving heavenly Father has already said who they are. The Bible story tells them the truth. They can find out who they were made to be, who they are and who they will be. Once they understand, they can live free. They can make better decisions. They can be more confident. And, crucially, they can feel better.

As Christians, we are not defined by our appearances.

We are not a collection of logos and brands. We are not our hairstyle, weight or disability. We are not the names we are called. We are not what other people see of us. As the prophet Samuel came to find the boy who would be the greatest king of the Old Testament, he was reminded that this was not going to be an orchestrated Instagram moment:

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

So it was that God chose a shepherd-boy, David, to be king of his people. And that shepherd-king pointed forwards to *the Shepherd-King*, the Lord Jesus, who promised:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:10-11)

Jesus’ words here have all the emotional uplift of a Hollywood blockbuster. Hear the feel-good story. Listen to the promise of life to the full. Which parent does not want that for their children? This is our universal desire for our children. Jesus Christ claimed that it was found in him, as the good shepherd.

Others come to steal, kill and destroy life—the shepherd came to give life. He did so by laying down his life at a moment in history. This is not a trendy self-help

philosophy or the latest breakthrough parenting book. This is flesh and bone. This is love and sacrifice. This is the real-life shepherd. This best life is available to “the sheep”.

We are not defined by those around us. But equally, we are not a blank sheet of paper. The only answer to the question “Who am I?” that gives us a confidence and a joy and a freedom is “I am a sheep”. It is the shepherd who tells us what we are and makes us what we are—at the cost of his own life.

God is a loving heavenly Father who adores your children. His children, if they live with their faith in him. He tells them, *You are precious because I made you, Your body is good because I made it and You have infinite value because my Son died for you.* If they know and feel God’s love, they will trust and obey him more fully.

Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

Being a parent is a strange business. What no one can prepare you for is the emotional burden. I feel an ache for my children, particularly when they feel broken, that compares to nothing else. When Jesus says that he knows the way for *my children* to be set free and to enjoy life to the full, I am all ears. I am all in. I think I am more engaged than when I think about the freedom that he has given *me*. To be a parent is to frequently find yourself putting your own freedom to one side for the sake of your children’s. In my better moments, I am clear that

my children will probably be my most significant legacy. I would choose to have achieved nothing with my life if they could be truly free.

I trust Jesus. He offers them freedom. When they are asked, “Who are you?” before all else, I want them to stand tall, to puff out their chests and to say in a clear, confident voice, “I am a disciple of Jesus. *This is me.*”

I want them, on their worst days, to remember that Jesus loves them and that that’s ultimately all that matters. I want them, on their best days, to remember that Jesus loves them and that that’s what matters most. I want them to meet with triumph and despair and treat both those experiences with the confidence that comes from knowing in their hearts that who they are, and who they will always be, is greatly loved children of a heavenly Father. Because if that is their identity, then they will navigate a confusing world, and walk towards an eternal home, with confidence.

THE SECOND SUNDAY

Parenting in our house seems mostly to be spent shouting the word “Shoes”, wondering how many screens are currently scattered throughout our home, and wishing that we carved out more of that mythical “quality family time” that we hear spoken of by people whose surname is not Drew.

But one day there will only be two pairs of shoes to find (and my wife is very good at sorting her own out), I will know where the screens are, and quality family time will

require our adult kids to come back for the weekend.

One day, our kids will not be here. And we parent for the day when we are not there. That will be when our parenting counts. The goal of our conversations, all our prodding, all our rules and all our praise is to prepare them for when they do it all without us.

I think about the second Sunday after my children have left home. I don't know where they will be living or why they will be there, but I suspect I will have helped them move there. Perhaps it will be in a place not far from us; maybe it will be at the other end of the country. Either way, they will be making their own decisions, and I won't know about many, if any, of them. On the first Sunday, they might well take themselves to church. It is what they have always done up until that point, so perhaps just the routine will take them along. When they get there, they may well know no one at all. It is going to be a shock. So many thoughts might be racing around their minds: "Who do I sit next to?", "Is it always like this?", "Do I *want* to come back *here*?" and "No one will notice if I don't come back".

So the second Sunday is going to be a significant moment. "Do I go back to that church? Do I go back to *any* church?" When something is new, different and probably difficult, you need something more than a well-worn routine. You need an identity. On that second Sunday, my kids, and your kids, need to be certain that church is part of who they are: that Jesus Christ and his people are part of the fabric of their identity.

That's what this book is about. It doesn't contain loads of surefire tactics for turning out super-happy kids. (If that's what you were hoping for, there are other books you can get that offer you those—personally I think they're over-promising and under-delivering.) I'm not going to suggest that I know all the answers. (Most days, I don't even know all the questions.) But we will be thinking: What does it look like to raise our kids to be confident in who they are, because they know whose they are? How do we parent in a way that points them to how God sees them as the fundamental basis of everything they are and do? Of course, it is God's grace and not our parenting that saves and changes our kids. But God tends to work through means, so what can you do now to prepare your kids to go to church with a song in their hearts on that second Sunday?

CULTURE > STRATEGY

There is a corporate saying: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." It is a warning to companies to beware thinking that a printed strategy with clear goals, new meetings and revised structures will change their future. It doesn't matter how many posters are placed on the wall with defined targets and catchy soundbites; if the culture of the organisation is disengaged, cynical or demotivated, growth will not happen. To bring about change, it is always the culture that needs to be worked on. Leaders need to be talking about the strategy in a way that shows that they actually care about it, and

everyone needs to be helped to see how their daily work is affected.

It is the same with parenting.

Your children live and breathe your family culture. They notice what you usually say in a crisis. They notice who you go to with your problems. They notice what gets the best of your time, what gets cancelled, what makes you angry and what makes you leap off the sofa with joy. They know what must never be interrupted and what competes for your attention. They know what goes on behind the front door in front of which you take the start-of-year photo.

That's challenging. But remember who you are: you are a sheep with a Shepherd, a child with a heavenly Father. You're not alone in your parenting. There's grace which can cover your failings and there's the Holy Spirit who can change you. Your family culture can increasingly reflect Jesus' lordship over you. Your parenting can increasingly reflect the Shepherd's love for you. This is a confusing world, for kids and for their parents. There's nothing like parenting to humble us. But that's ok—in Jesus, we have everything we need to raise confident kids. Keep going. He has you. You are his. This is who you are.

Questions to think about...

1. *Who are you?* How would you answer that question? What difference does being a follower of Christ make to your sense of identity?
2. Can you see a difference over your years as a Christian (if it has been years!) in terms of how you think about yourself, how you talk about yourself, and where your sense of peace comes from?
3. What do you think your child(ren) would say if you asked them to describe who they are?
4. In times of difficulty, who do they speak to and what do they do? When they feel unsettled or insecure, what activity or place would provide comfort and security?

There is not one right answer to these questions. Step back from your family and look at what takes the best of your time and a big chunk of your enthusiasm and money.