




"Solid, practical advice. . . . I highly recommend this book."

GARY CHAPMAN

RAISING

GRATEFUL
KIDS
 IN AN 
ENTITLED
WORLD

HOW ONE FAMILY LEARNED THAT SAYING NO
CAN LEAD TO LIFE'S BIGGEST YES



KRISTEN WELCH

Rearing children in our contemporary culture is difficult, but rearing grateful children is even harder. In *Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World*, Kristen Welch gives solid practical advice. Grateful children become responsible adults. I highly recommend this book.

GARY CHAPMAN, PH.D.

Author of *The Five Love Languages*

In this fast-paced, instant gratification culture, Kristen's countercultural message of selflessness and gratitude is much needed! This book left me convicted, challenged, and encouraged, both personally and as a parent.

CRYSTAL PAINE

Founder of MoneySavingMom.com and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Say Goodbye to Survival Mode*

I absolutely love this book. Kristen unearths the heart issue of why many children are selfish and unaware of the needs of others. Her words engage, inspire, and instruct parents in raising emotionally strong, healthy children who are grateful in the important moments of life.

SALLY CLARKSON

Author of *The Lifegiving Home* and *Own Your Life*, and blogger at SallyClarkson.com

Kristen's words are so timely, and I am thankful for her hard-fought wisdom. I am all ears whenever Kristen writes because she just gets it, and it was no different with this book. If you're looking for support and practical ideas on how to raise grateful kids in an increasingly entitled world, this book is a must-read.

SARAH MAE

Author of *Longing for Paris*

I can't think of anyone I would trust more than Kristen to teach on this topic. She's made her entire life a testimony to doing this well, and everyone who reads this book will be inspired by her story, her heart, her wisdom, and her love of the Lord.

ANGIE SMITH

Bestselling author of several books and Bible studies including *Chasing God* and *Seamless*

Parents today fight what seems like a never-ending battle against the current of the culture in raising our children. In *Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World*, Kristen not only inspires us to raise our children differently, but she teaches us how to actually live that out in our homes. So very practical and convicting. A must-read!

RUTH SCHWENK

Pastor's wife and mama to four, coauthor of *Hoodwinked*, and creator of TheBetterMom.com

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Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World: How One Family Learned That Saying No Can Lead to Life's Biggest Yes

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Designed by Ron Kaufmann

Edited by Bonne Steffen

Published in association with the literary agency of William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 119 Bampton Court, Eugene, OR 97404.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Welch, Kristen.

Raising grateful kids in an entitled world : how one family learned that saying no can lead to life's biggest yes / Kristen Welch.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4964-0529-6 (sc)

1. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Gratitude—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4529.W45 2015

248.8'45—dc23

2015030200

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION



A FORD F-150 PICKUP TRUCK sits in our driveway. My husband, Terrell, wears a cowboy hat on Saturday to mow the lawn and his western boots every day of the week. We grow our own tomatoes and fry okra every chance we get, and we are the proud owners of our very own septic system.

It's not uncommon to park behind a horse trailer at the Target or Chick-fil-A down the street from our house. We aren't really country; we are just Texans, and proud of it. We love our big green backyard, the friendly neighbors, and the slower pace. And cowboy boots are a part of our story.

Every spring we go to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. It's not only a big deal around these parts; it's the biggest indoor rodeo in the United States. We set aside money for this annual outing for our family to cover our meals, tickets for the events, and an extra-special fried treat.

A couple of years ago, we decided it was high time our three growing kids got their first pair of cowboy boots. You might call it a rite of passage for children in Texas and the western states. We budgeted even more than usual, setting

our sights to purchase them at the rodeo because we knew there would be plenty to choose from as well as special deals that would save us money.

On the hour trip downtown, one of my kids (who will remain nameless) complained about the seat arrangements in the van, the heat, and the very air siblings dared to breathe. I corrected said child, and I was half tempted to squash the dream of boots, leaving this one scuffling along in tennis shoes, but after a quick apology was received, grace won out.

We headed straight to the Justin Boots booth and helped all three of our kids try on and choose boots that (1) they loved and (2) we could afford—which was a feat in and of itself because my kids can be picky and boots are expensive. But we accomplished our goal in under an hour and spent the rest of the day in new boots—looking at animals, watching roping events, and eating large amounts of food that probably shouldn't be fried. (I'm looking at you, bacon and Oreos.)

On the way home, the same child's bad attitude surfaced again, this time about not getting to do something at the rodeo. It wasn't just whining, the result of a tiring day; it was ingratitude and entitlement. Complaints and warnings fired in rapid succession between the backseat and the front. The day had been a splurge from the beginning, but it wasn't appreciated. But mostly, it wasn't enough. Even after grace put a nice pair of boots on the kid's feet.

Halfway home, in the middle of the tense ride with an unrepentant boot wearer in the backseat, Terrell said, "That's it. When we get home, I want you to pack your boots back in the box. I'll see if we can't return them to Cavender's [a local boot store]."

This nearly broke my Texas heart, but I knew it was the right thing to do.

We didn't buy the boots to take them away. As a matter of fact, at first Terrell couldn't find the receipt after he said it. As he fumbled in his pocket, I bit my lip because this parenting thing is so hard. We wanted our child to enjoy our generous gift for the feet, but it was the heart that needed immediate attention.

It saddened me to hear the tears, the begging, the promises. Then the question, "Why can't you show me grace?"

"Buying you the boots in the first place *was* grace," I said.

Once we were home, Terrell put the boxed boots on a high shelf in the laundry room and said, "If you want the boots, you'll have to work for them." He pointed to the huge mulched areas in the front and back yards. "You have three days to pull every weed. I won't remind you; it's up to you. This job will pay for your boots. This time you're going to earn them."

And that was that.

The rodeo happens in early March, usually before we have a chance to clean up winter's effect on our yard. My gaze followed my husband's pointing finger to the weedy mulch beds, and my heart sank. It was going to be a lot of work. Lo, the weeds were many.

My husband is hardly a dictator. He's kind and loving and a lot nicer than I am most days. But I could tell by the firmness in his voice and the tilt of his chin that he was serious. *This* was serious. The mounting ingratitude that had been an issue for weeks had to be addressed. I wanted to high-five him and sob at the same time.

I wondered what our child would choose.

My heart soared a little while later when I heard the front door click. I looked out the window and saw my kid wearing old clothes, bent down in the wet mulch. It had started to rain.

For the next two days, I watched from that window. A little proud, a little brokenhearted, but with every pulled weed, I knew the hard work was making for a softer heart.

When Terrell handed back the boots after hearing a meaningful apology, I knew we had all won. “You earned these,” he said. “I won’t take them away again.”

The boots meant twice as much.

It will go down in our family history as the infamous boot story. It was the day we generously bought our kids cowboy

*With every pulled weed,
I knew the hard work was
making for a softer heart.*

boots. It was the same day we took them away because of ingratitude. It definitely wasn’t the first day my kids acted unthankful—and there have been many times since.

But it was a day we called out entitlement in our home and waged war against it. It was the day we reestablished the fact that we wanted to raise grateful kids more than anything else.

If you ask most parents what they want for their kids, they say, “I want them to be happy.” Most might even have the same answer for themselves. Instead of happiness being a by-product of the life we live, it has become an elusive destination. And our culture is obsessed with pursuing it. We go into debt for it. We leave our marriages to attain it. We allow child-centered homes in hopes that our kids can achieve it. That’s not to say we aren’t doing a great job in some areas.

I agree with Dan Kindlon, a psychiatrist and author of *Too Much of a Good Thing*:

Compared to earlier generations, we are emotionally closer to our kids, they confide in us more, we have more fun with them, and we know about the science of child development. But we are too indulgent. We give our kids too much and demand too little of them.¹

Let me say that I've always been close to my parents and confided in them (even to this day), but I was guilty as a young mother of often giving in to the temptation to provide fun for my kids all the time. It didn't take me long, though, to realize that too many fun days make the boring ones harder to bear.

Kindlon goes on to say,

I find myself at the center of this problem as I try, with my wife, to balance the two major tasks of parenting: showing our kids that we love them and raising them with the skills and values they'll need to be emotionally healthy adults, which often requires that we act in ways that can anger and upset them.²

The bottom line, Kindlon concludes, is that parents are raising spoiled kids. I know exactly what he is talking about. When we try to protect our kids from unhappiness, we make life down the road harder for them. It can be summed up in one word—*entitlement*.

Entitlement is a hot topic today. The root word *entitled* means exactly what it says—to give someone a title or a right. It used to be reserved for the wealthy and the privileged, based upon economics or status, but now it seems to have shifted to human nature and our rights—the “feeling or belief that you deserve to be given something.”³ We live in a culture

We live in a culture that is obsessed with the right to have what we want.

that is obsessed with the right to have what we want, whether we’ve earned it or not.

Guess what happens when you decide to deal with entitlement in your home (or dare to write a book about it)? You become your own case study. The minute we named it for what it was and began addressing it, we began to recognize it at every turn. And honestly, parenting got harder.

But at the same time, we got better at identifying it and braver at dealing with it and more dependent on God in eradicating it. We looked for ways to change perspectives, sought opportunities to serve, required hard work, and made gratitude our goal. All of these actions were evidence of our commitment to life’s biggest yes—to love God and love others more than ourselves. And honestly, parenting got a little easier.

I never wanted to write a parenting book. When I started writing on my blog about gratitude in the face of entitlement, I was writing from a place of struggle, not success. I’m mother to an elementary-aged child (Emerson), a junior higher (Jon-Avery), and a high schooler (Madison). I’m writing from the middle of my mess, not from my accomplishment. I am in the thick of it. I don’t have a psychology degree or a master’s in counseling. I’m not an expert

or a professional. I'm a mom. I'm your peer, and I'm in the trenches with you.

Terrell and I aren't perfect parents, and we make mistakes all the time. I tend to be a control freak, and I talk before I listen. I also have a temper and can be high strung (to name a few of my flaws). Terrell is more patient, but he's also a "get over it" kind of parent, and he doesn't always get our emotional daughters.

I want to tell you what this book is not—it's not a guide, nor a list of dos and don'ts. It won't offer you a fail-proof parenting plan, and it's not a guilt trip. It's not the answers to all your late-night burning questions that beg to be answered: *Does my child need more grace or more discipline right now? Am I handling this situation correctly?*

While I do bring in expert opinions and share research and some suggestions, this book is my confessional. It's a record of our journey of attempting to raise grateful kids instead of entitled ones. It's the ups and downs, the defeats and victories of such a difficult task. It's my unfinished story. It's also a history lesson from the past, a cultural lesson for the present, and a daunting challenge to learn from one and overcome the second. But mostly, this book is an encouragement to parents swimming upstream in a society that demands we do what is culturally accepted.

We are Christians, yes, and we love Jesus and we do our best to live for him. Every family is different—maybe you love God but your lives look different than ours; maybe you haven't thought much about spiritual things but would like that to change. This book is about our family's journey, and while what you'll read here is Christ-centered, you are

welcome to join the journey no matter where you are coming from.

A word of caution and a disclaimer.

Anytime we step out of the mainstream and try to turn our lives (or homes) around and dare to go upstream, it's

*It's in our human makeup
to want to fit in, to not
be different.*

hard. 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.

The problem is, we are called to exactly that—to go against the flow. In one of my favorite Scriptures, followers of Jesus are encouraged to live differently than the world, to live upstream.

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture
that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead,
fix your attention on God.

ROMANS 12:2, MSG

Not only is this way of life possible, it's commanded. But we cannot do it alone. We need God's help; we need each other's help. Because when we dare to lead in a go-against-the-flow, countercultural home, we are standing against what is accepted and "normal." We will face opposition from the world, from our children, and possibly from other Christians. It's not popular, but most good things aren't.

INTRODUCTION

I'm a parent, and I wrote this book *for* parents. It's not instruction for kids or a tell-all of my children's mistakes (my intention is to share the lessons learned from my perspective, not theirs). No matter how old your kids are, you can apply the simple suggestions in leading your family upstream. At the end of every chapter, there is a section called "Going against the Flow" that contains practical, age-appropriate suggestions for grateful, countercultural living for you and your kids.

Are you ready to jump in?

Kristen Welch



PART I
LAUNCH

What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude.

BRENÉ BROWN

CHAPTER 1

WANTS VS. NEEDS



IN ONE OF COMEDIAN Jim Gaffigan’s stand-up routines, he describes how we act when we first arrive at a hotel. We walk into the lobby and exclaim, “Wow, this place is amazing!” We find our room, take a good look around, and we love it. By day two, with unmade beds and suitcases strewn across the floor, the mystique begins to wear off. Suddenly, we look around and say, “This place is a dump.” When we return from a day of fun and the housekeeping staff hasn’t had a chance to clean up *our* mess, we are outraged. “There’s a wet towel still on the bathroom floor! How could they? I’m calling to complain!”

Gaffigan’s audience explodes with laughter because it’s funny. But the problem is, it’s also true—and maybe that’s

not so funny, especially when our kids are standing next to us in the hotel room, listening to our indignant attitude. It's startling how quickly our gratitude turns into ingratitude.

But, we reason, if we've paid our hard-earned money, shouldn't we be guaranteed a good night's stay with impeccable service? We are entitled to at least that. They owe us, right?

If we look closer, we can see that this same attitude pervades not only our culture, but also our homes. We often buy things not so much because we need them, but because we feel like we deserve them. We work hard; we owe it to ourselves. It's so easy to get wrapped up in this way of thinking.

I'm guilty too.

We've been in our current home for two years. I've grown tired of the builder's drab beige walls, and I started toying with the idea of painting. But with neck and back issues of my own and a husband who loathes painting projects, I knew the only way to get it done was to hire someone. Terrell agreed it would be a great improvement, but he suggested we should wait since he was transitioning out of his corporate job into the role of CEO of our small nonprofit. He was being cautious about our finances.

I was immediately indignant. *Wait? I have waited.* And then I began to go down the list of my self-sacrifice and service, the reasons I deserved this home makeover. Terrell smiled and said, "You sort of sound entitled right now." Oh. That comment took the wind out of my sails. And honestly, it hurt my feelings because he was right.

We don't want to wait. Here in the United States, we live in a fast-paced, convenience-driven, impatient culture. Some might even say this is the beauty of the American Dream—working hard so you get what you want in life, which has attracted countless immigrants to come here. And we are very, very good at it.

THE GOOD LIFE

The term “American Dream” was first used by James Truslow Adams in 1931 in his book *The Epic of America*. There he described it as “a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable.”¹

But I've discovered that like many things in life, definitions change. A more current description of the American Dream is “an American social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity.”² I asked my blog readers for their own perspective on the term and got dozens of responses, such as this one from Kim Frey:

Our grandparents probably viewed it as the ability to get out of poverty, to provide for loved ones, and to have a comfortable home, getting a strong basic education, having a good work ethic, and being content with what you have. . . . I think the idea of the American Dream has become much more materialistic in the past few decades . . . “Bigger, better, faster, and more” has defined it recently.

Reader Angela Sellman agreed and added this:

[The American Dream is] bigger, more. Newer is better. *Everyone* must have the newest gadget, cars, and *fun fun fun* at all times. Happiness all the time is the goal for everyone!

Or there's the definition Terrell heard on the radio years ago that he's never forgotten:

The American Dream is getting all you can. Canning all you can get. Sitting on the can so nobody can get what you can.

Has the dream changed? It seems to have morphed from a rags-to-riches, hard work ethic mentality to prosperity now. Or perhaps the dream is the same, but *we* have changed. I'm not sure the concept can be quantified, especially considering inflation, but I think we can all agree something has changed. The median income of Americans has dropped considerably since the beginning of the 2008 recession, but we're paying over 15 percent more for new cars.

And it's not just what we drive; houses have nearly tripled in size and families have gotten smaller. In 1950, the average house was 983 square feet, but by 2014 it had reached 2,598 square feet.³

And growth like this isn't cheap. *USA Today* published a report in 2014 that put a price tag on the American Dream: \$130,000 a year, which includes a nice six-figure salary, luxury vacations, college savings, and retirement.⁴

Our family signed up for that track when my husband landed his first corporate job, after nearly ten years in full-time ministry. We finally had a 401(k), dental insurance, and a ladder to climb up. We scraped our money together, packed up our rented 1,000-square-foot townhome, and couldn't believe the sellers had accepted our bottom-dollar offer on our dream house. We moved in mid-December and scrambled to put up a Charlie Brown Christmas tree, mostly for our two kids, who were two and four years old at the time. There were a few gifts scattered underneath the tree, but we all knew we'd really gotten a house for Christmas.

But within two years of living the dream in a house I loved at first sight, I began to see it in a completely different light. And the light glared brighter every time I visited someone else's house. Why hadn't I noticed how small our living room was or how badly the floors needed work? Over time, we began to update our home. We pulled down wallpaper, hired a painter, built a sprawling deck, added a couple of walls . . . all great improvements and not bad in and of themselves. But somewhere along the way, I began referring to this house I had once dreamed of owning as our "starter home." What had once been more than enough eventually became not enough.

Every year Christmas got bigger and bigger in that house. We put up the biggest tree we could find in the front bay window and the thousand white lights that adorned it could be seen from the street. I spent a lot of time and money decorating nearly every room. I'll never forget the Christmas morning when my kids were six and four

What had once been more than enough eventually became not enough.

years old and there were piles of presents under the tree, dozens for each of them. I didn't feel it was excessive because I was an organized deal shopper and had gotten most of the toys on sale months before. I was as excited as my kids, and I couldn't wait to see their faces as they opened each gift in delight.

But it didn't really happen that way. It was a blur of grabbing and tearing into gifts, and within minutes the room looked like a tornado had ripped through it. I watched my kids go from one gift to another, hardly taking the time to even remove all the paper. With piles of opened gifts and still more to go, they actually seemed tired from the exertion of opening so many. We took a break and cleaned up for a bit before we started round two. There were some gasps of delight here and there, but with a room full of stuff, I don't think I've ever felt emptier.

I pushed the depressing thought away and encouraged my kids to say thank you. To my husband, I justified the piles of presents proudly, saying it was a debt-free Christmas. But the nagging feeling stayed with me the rest of the day. I realized what bothered me that morning wasn't just about having more stuff; it was about getting more stuff. And it was my problem, as much as my kids'. Maybe more.

AN ATTITUDE IS BORN

I married my husband two weeks before Christmas in 1994. After a week honeymooning, we woke up on Christmas morning in our first apartment with dozens of wedding gifts to unwrap. It was just as romantic as it sounds. After a leisurely morning of opening presents we didn't pay for, we drove an hour to my parents' house to a feast we didn't have

to prepare. We were the newlyweds, and we were special. By the next Christmas and our first anniversary, we lived hundreds of miles from home and it was my in-laws' turn to have us as Christmas guests.

I pitched a fit to my husband about it. I had never spent the holidays away from my family, and even though my husband missed his family as much as I missed mine, I acted like a spoiled brat. I whined and cried and finally gave in. We didn't have a lot of money, but I couldn't imagine not opening gifts on Christmas, so we saved \$100 to spend on each other. I shopped and searched and I bought Terrell five gifts with the money.

On Christmas morning at his parents' house, the extended family opened their gifts to each other, but I didn't see any for me from my young husband. Meanwhile, he was opening his fourth one from me . . . a used Rook game off eBay. (It seemed like a good idea at the time.)

The gifts were all opened and Terrell gave me a sly look. I was trying not to cry. He went over to the tree and pulled off a papier-mâché ornament. He opened the ball to reveal a beautiful pearl necklace inside. When he put it around my neck, I said thank you—and then I went to the bathroom and cried. I was so disappointed that I only had one gift from him under the tree.

Oh, boy. I had a lot to learn. I didn't just want something; I wanted more. And when I became a mom, this attitude spilled over into my early parenting. I wanted my kids to have more, the best. I wanted them to have it all, too.

My buy-in to the notion that I needed more of the best for myself and my kids didn't satisfy me. Its pursuit actually

left me feeling emptier than when I had less. Things didn't begin to shift for me until a couple of years later, when I traveled to Kenya, Africa, with Compassion International as a blogger. It was there in one of the world's largest and poorest slums that I began to see my life and my own entitlement in light of how the rest of the world lived. It shook me to the core and flipped a switch inside me that made me stop and

Entitlement didn't start with my kids. It began with me. I entitled them because I was entitled.

reevaluate what was happening. Entitlement didn't start with my kids. It began with me. *I entitled them* because I was entitled.

I saw just how big the world was—millions and millions of people, moms and dads with kids, just like my family, only they didn't seem to be entitled to anything, not even enough food for the day or clean water to drink. I realized how small I was. I saw my glaring selfish tendencies and my spoiled nature, and I wanted to live differently.

That discovery led my family and me on a wild faith adventure of saying yes to God in seemingly impossible ways by helping girls and women trapped in a cycle of violence and poverty. Honestly, I wouldn't have chosen this road for my family—I am entirely too afraid and selfish. But I wouldn't change our journey for all the money in the world because it's given my family the valuable gift of perspective, which reveals our deep need for gratitude, no matter what we have or don't have.

WANTS VS. NEEDS

I don't always know how to combat the struggle against entitlement in my life or home, but I need to try.

And as uncomfortable as it sounds, parents who want less-entitled kids have to be less entitled themselves, and parents who want to raise more grateful kids need to start by living more grateful lives.

As Americans, my family and I do have certain entitlements that are found in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men.”⁵

Joshua Becker, author of the popular blog *Becoming Minimalist*, says,

As Americans, we are free to pursue our own happiness—however we decide to define it. . . . And those of us who have chosen to define happiness and security apart from \$250K mortgages and SUVs in the garage are free to do so. Because there are greater and more important pursuits available to us than material possessions.⁶

When we pare down what we have a right to, besides what we’ve acquired through citizenship—which cost people their lives—the list is small. The gifts of salvation, grace, and forgiveness are free for the taking, but they weren’t cheap. They cost Jesus His life.

Considering the issue as parents, what are our children entitled to? What exactly do we owe them? What is too much or not enough? Are they entitled to the latest technology,

a new car at sixteen, or a fully paid college education? Some would say yes—these are the responsibilities that come with parenting.

One day in the car, my oldest, who was barely a tween at the time, overheard Terrell and me talking about Mercy House, our nonprofit ministry that funds a maternity home in Kenya. We were contemplating some pretty serious finan-

cial decisions for the future. It must have made her think because she asked me, “Mom, what is your plan for my college education?”

“Well, it went to Africa,” I said, laughing. “I’m joking, but hon-

estly, we don’t have plans to foot the bill for four years of college, honey. You will get a college education if you want it and work hard for it. It will happen with a combination of scholarships, work study, local summer school, and your dad and I contributing what we can too.”

Madison is a gifted flute player. Years before, at the advice of her school flute teacher, we bought Madison a professional flute, paying more money than we wanted to. The teacher urged us to invest in our daughter’s musical gift even if we didn’t have college figured out. Since the sixth grade, Madison has known that college scholarships are part of the plan. It has spurred on her love for music. But it’s also been a tangible reminder that college is not a free ride in our house.

I believe Gary Chapman and Arlene Pellicane, coauthors of *Growing Up Social*, zero in on something that is inarguable.

Parents who want to raise more grateful kids need to start by living more grateful lives.

The only thing a child is really entitled to is his parents' love. Not to keep up with the Joneses. Not a brand new bike or iPad. Just love. Every child deserves to be loved by his or her parents. If a child has your unconditional love, he has the greatest asset in the world. If we as parents can realize it's love that our children need most, and not things, we will stop trying to buy our children's happiness with possessions.⁷

Whatever you choose to provide for your kids is really up to you. The answer will be different for every family. But when our kids begin to expect—even demand—more than our love, that's when we have a problem.

And it goes well beyond providing and pursuing material possessions. What our culture feels entitled to isn't just stuff.

It's the desire to fit in, to feel good or happy all the time; it's the desire for instant gratification and the demand to receive something just because we want it, hard work optional.

One of my kids really struggled for a season with the idea of being happy all the time. This child is more of a pessimist by nature (and so much like me), and it became obvious that when my child didn't feel happy, we saw more negative behavior. It takes consistent teaching to remember we aren't owed happiness all the time. That's not our goal because God can use disappointments and even discouragement to draw

When our kids begin to expect—even demand—more than our love, that's when we have a problem.

us closer to Him. Contentment is our aim because it doesn't fluctuate with our circumstances.

In their book *The Entitlement Trap*, authors Richard and Linda Eyre pinpoint the growing problem.

Kids grow up in a reality-show world, thinking of themselves as the central character on the stage. They have a Facebook page, they are famous in their own minds, they are like rock stars, and to them there is no room (and no need) for true emotional empathy, or self-examination, or personal responsibility. Nor is there incentive or motivation to learn to work. And they think they are entitled *not* to have limits or boundaries or discipline.⁸

Early on, we chose not to allow our kids to interact on social media until they entered high school. Even after they were allowed to open accounts, we didn't encourage it and monitored their involvement. I think our resistance impacted them, and they are selective about social media. But society is in the age of unbridled and often unmonitored technology. Sometimes it's because we parents are afraid to say no or we don't want our children to feel left out. But it doesn't take a rocket scientist to recognize that parenting has changed since we were kids.

Terrell loves telling our kids the story of when he was eleven years old and desperately wanted a ten-speed bike. His parents bought him exactly what he wanted. And then a couple of months later, after the release of the hit movie *E.T.*, BMX bikes were all the rage. Terrell asked his parents

for another bike. They told him, “If you want another bike, you’ll have to earn the money and buy it yourself.” It took him a year of sweeping his dad’s print shop to earn \$112 for the bike. To this day, he still speaks fondly about that bike.

The book I referenced in the introduction, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, was based on a poll and study in 2001 called “The Parenting Practices at the Millennium.” Its author, Dan Kindlon, gathered data, interviewed, and studied behaviors of advantaged kids and their parents, teachers, and administrators from all over the United States. I found his research and results fascinating, some of which I will share throughout this book.

While I respect Kindlon’s work greatly, his study was written fifteen years ago from a secular worldview. Although I don’t claim to be an expert like Dr. Kindlon and my research isn’t scientific, I thought it would be wise to ask my own questions from a more current Christian worldview. In the fall of 2014, I surveyed more than 5,000 parents from all over the country and have included that information in this book too.

When I asked parents to check off what their kids own (3,316 chose to answer this question), these were the results:

- 74 percent have an iPod or Kindle
- 55 percent have a cell phone
- 30 percent have a television in their room
- 35 percent have a personal laptop or computer
- 16 percent have a car of their own
- 5 percent have a debit or credit card for their parent’s account.

There are many unknown variables—such as ages, whether or not the kids bought items themselves, and so forth—but the fact remains that our kids have a lot of stuff we didn't have at their age. And it seems this stash of stuff just continues to grow, stocked mostly by indulgent parents.

I think if we want to tackle entitlement and ingratitude in our children, it comes down to us and our choices. We have to examine ourselves and begin there. After all, how can we show our kids gratitude unless we are thankful? How can we ask them to go upstream when we are caught in the whirlpool of our culture that demands more as the goal?

I get to spend time with a lot of young moms who volunteer at Mercy House. One day, a woman named Ashley and I were talking as we sorted items to list in the online store. I was telling her how my daughter always wanted to borrow my clothes, which many see as a form of flattery. I do, too, unless I have to dig through the laundry on her bedroom floor when I want to wear them. That story led to a conversation on entitlement.

“Oh, I know what you're talking about,” she said. I looked up from what I was doing, wondering what she could possibly be referring to since her three kids were just preschoolers. “I wanted to take my little girl on a special mommy-daughter date, so I arranged a babysitter for the boys. I couldn't wait to tell her about the morning I had planned. I pulled her aside and said, ‘Guess what? Mommy is going to take you on a special date. We are going ice skating, and then we are going to have hot chocolate.’”

Without missing a beat, her four-year-old said, “Is that all?”

As my friend retold the story, I could hear the pain in her

voice. She immediately saw the entitlement for what it was and explained to her daughter that she should be grateful for whatever they did together. “Okay,” her little girl said and went off to play, without even understanding that her innocent question revealed her humanity.

Entitlement winds its course through my home, and the more I’ve become aware of its subtle infiltration, the more I see and hear it blatantly. *This is all I get? There’s nothing else?* From ice cream serving sizes to allowances, the opportunity to demand more is present.

Is that all? I believe these three little words sum up the tone for those of us in most Western cultures. No one teaches us to ask that question or expect more. It’s in our nature.

Just as Romans 3:23 says, “Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (NLT). We are sinful and selfish at birth, and babies run parents ragged through long, sleepless nights demanding their needs be met immediately. But at some point, we grow up and begin to understand that the world doesn’t automatically cater to our demands like our parents did. We as parents have to examine the question for ourselves, so we can say to our children with conviction, “Yes, that is all. We don’t need more.”

Is that all? I believe these three little words sum up the tone in our culture.

As discouraging as the task of defeating entitlement in our lives may seem, I’m convinced it can be done. We can turn the tide in our homes and go against the climate in our culture by teaching a more powerful learned behavior—gratitude—that we will spend a lot of time unpacking in the

coming chapters. It might sound simplistic, but I believe the cure to our kids wanting more starts with teaching them to be thankful for what they already have.

GOING AGAINST THE FLOW

Parents

- > Ask God to reveal to you your own entitlement issues. It's the best place to start.
- > In what areas of your life do you struggle with entitlement? Do you put expectations on your spouse or friends or even your children?
- > Keep a gratitude journal, getting kids to participate too. Or write down the highs from your day and put them in a container at your table. Choose random times to pull out the slips of paper and reflect on the good things in your life.

Toddlers/Preschoolers

- > This is the perfect age to begin teaching gratitude. Toddlers and preschoolers are all about mimicking our behavior. We can show them gratitude by displaying it to our spouses and to them.
- > Color pictures and give them as thank-you notes to others.

Elementary

- > Write blessings on sticky notes and put them on a mirror or fill up a whole window as a family with jotted-down gratitude.

- > Begin the process of connecting work with reward. Consider putting a job board in the kitchen. It's a great way to begin teaching kids the correlation between hard work and earning money, and it's a great way to counteract entitlement.

Tweens/Teens

- > Make your expectations clear. If you've noticed an attitude of entitlement in your tween/teen, talk with him or her about your expectations. Don't believe the lie that it is too late. If your teen isn't contributing, let him or her know what you expect.
- > Don't engage in a battle. You might need to give reminders and reinforcements of your requirement if it's new. If your older child won't cooperate, use Dr. Kevin Leman's strategy that B (something your son or daughter wants to do) doesn't happen until A (something you want him or her to do) is completed.
- > Give your tween/teen the gift of listening. At this age, more than anything, your child wants you to hear him or her (which is different from understanding or even agreeing with your teen).