

Loving Unlovable Kids

“They say you have to earn the right to be loved; no, love is unconditional. If you love someone, they don’t have to earn it. But the right to tell someone that you love them? That has to be earned. You have to earn the right to be believed.” –C. JoyBell C.

Jana is in the second grade. She comes from a rural home with very little means. Her clothes are dirty. It’s unclear when she bathed last. She’s got a lot of anger pent up inside, and she’s not the least bit interested in what you have to say to her. Jana has had greater success pushing others away than drawing them near.

Brian is in the fourth grade. He has ADHD, can’t sit still and has little sense of self-control, and his obsession with the *Star Wars* universe definitely tips the scale. Brian is not a popular guy among his peers—unless you share his extensive knowledge and passion for the art of lightsaber sparring.

Brian is one of those kids who struggles to fit in. And though this is typical for a preteen, it’s painfully obvious that Brian will continue to struggle for years to come.

It’s tough to encounter kids like Jana and Brian. Though you can love them, quirks and all, it’s difficult to see how the time you invest can really make a difference. Knowing how the world works, chances are good the messages Jana and Brian receive on a daily basis tell them they are not worthy of love.

The truth is, the world will continue to teach them their self-worth is tied to their performance—to how they act, how they dress, how they achieve. They will learn that although we say love is unconditional, it’s really not. They will learn when someone says “I love you,” it doesn’t apply to them.

We've all encountered Jana and Brian. We've had them in our groups. And we've been challenged to figure out how to love them—how to get beyond the stuff that doesn't matter and penetrate what does.

How can you counteract what the rest of the world tells them?

How can our words, our attention, our encouragement once a week counter all the other messages they received that week? How can we set them on a better trajectory when we have so little time?

It seems like an impossible task.

But then, we serve a God who has a track record for making the impossible possible.

Maybe that's why He made words so powerful. Because a consistent message shared over time can penetrate the toughest of barriers. And sharing a message consistently requires that you be present consistently—that you simply show up ... predictably, mentally and randomly.

Showing up predictably in Brian's life allows you to build a trust he's learned to invest sparingly. Showing up mentally in Jana's life allows her to know that what she loves, others can love too. Showing up randomly in Brian and Jana's lives allows you to share a message they don't hear enough and may not believe yet but desperately need—a message that says, "You matter."

Even more importantly, by showing up and consistently sharing this message, kids like Jana and Brian might go one step beyond hearing you. They just might start to believe you.

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too seriously. Visit her blog at for more information about her ministry.