

Girls are "pretty." Boys are "cool."

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The topic of beauty has entered our household as our 3-year-old daughter acclimatizes herself to a culture determined to unite self-esteem with a particular version of beauty. "Pretty" is a word we hear regularly, often only said in relation to something dressed up or done up.

On top of that, her notions of "pretty" are tied into burgeoning concepts of gender stereotyping, where only girls can be "pretty" and boys are "cool" (always in reference to her dad, of course).

As parents, navigating the realities of beauty and gender can be a daunting task. With so many voices of influence, it's easy to become frustrated or cynical towards the impact culture can have on the formation of our daughter. We can be left wondering what influence we actually have on that formation.

Behind our frustration is the question of value—what makes a person valuable? What makes a person pretty? Or cool? "Pretty" and "cool" are often statements of temporary value, based on a certain look or a momentary characteristic—they are culturally limited statements. So when it comes to a person's value, humanity needs more. Our daughter needs more.

We've tried not to overreact one way or another at what's "pretty" and what's "cool" in our household. Parents never seem to get it right anyway. But we are very aware that these phrases can't be all our daughter hear when it comes to recognizing her value.

One of my increasingly favorite phrases from the Bible relates well to this issue. Upon creating the heavens and the earth and all that is within the earth, including humans, we get this description of how God views us: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Very good.

The Hebrew meaning is far more than situational or about appearance. The earth didn't just look pretty. And Adam and Eve may not have been cool. Creation's goodness wasn't shallow or simply God's opinion. Genesis doesn't say God saw that it was very good. No, God saw it, and it was very good. This is a value—a goodness—that is embedded into the world. And into humanity. We need to remember, then, that alongside the prettys and the cools—and yes, the uglies and the uncools—is the reality that the “it was very good” echoes into history and into our very lives. And into our daughter's life. Yes, at times this goodness dims, hidden behind sickness, pain, sorrow, and sin—goodness needs to be restored where it is missing. But the inherent value of our very being persists beyond the pretty and the cool.

Girls can sometimes be called pretty, yes. But may they always know they are very good.

And boys can sometimes be cool too. But may they always know they are also very good.

Pretty and cool are fine, but limited. Goodness is permanent. This is a message my daughter needs to hear. This is a message we all need to hear.

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