

Different but the Same

We're all equally loved by God and created in His image.

HomeLife talks with mom and best-selling author, Laura Wifler.

AS A MOTHER TO A child with disabilities, Laura Wifler has experienced firsthand the questions other children have when it comes to disabilities. And she's found that often children simply need a bit of help to see that a child with disabilities is actually a lot like them. Maybe they love candy, birthday parties, or animals, and they want to have fun, have friends, or feel included. When children recognize this, when they see they have sameness with someone else, a foundation for friendship is born.

This is why she wrote *Like Me*, a children's picture book that follows a sibling of a child with disabilities as they go through their day. It's a simple story, but the message is incredibly important. *Like Me* helps kids recognize that all people have different needs and abilities and are equally loved by God and created in His image. This book will give your children an understanding of a different type of family life — going to therapy, making accommodations — but also help them see many relatable comparisons and ways they are the same.

Laura's hope for *Like Me* is that children will see what a privilege it is to know another person — no matter their abilities — and realize what a gift it is to be friends. This is what else she shared with *HomeLife* (HL) and wants to share with you.

HL: One of your greatest desires is for your daughter, Eden, to form friendships. How does teaching our kids *imago Dei* (the image of God) get us towards this goal that every parent desires?

LW: Building a robust understanding of the *imago Dei* in children teaches them that no matter a person's abilities, physical features, social status, gifts, or talents, all humans have inherent dignity, value, and worth given and determined by God. (See Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 139:14.) This isn't just an incredible truth for your child to know about themselves, but it also teaches them how to view other people as well. All people carry the stamp of God on them. As parents, we can teach our children to see people with disabilities the way God sees them — with compassion, love, value, and dignity. Not just to create a kinder world (though that's a good thing) but, more importantly, to reflect the heart of God — welcoming others just as Christ welcomed us, to the glory of God. (See Rom. 15:7.)

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HL: What advice do you have for a mom who has a child with disabilities?

LW: Allow yourself to grieve. It's OK to be sad. It's OK to be angry. Disability wasn't part of God's original creation, but it resulted from the fall. So in that sense, this isn't the way it's supposed to be. Tell God how you feel. He can handle it. But also remember not to grieve the things you haven't been asked to grieve yet. It's tempting to jump to conclusions or hear a doctor's prediction that's based on a hunch or statistic rather than a fact and let it devastate us. Yet, it's not our reality now and we don't know if it ever will be. Live in the here and now. Trust God with what is real and right in front of you. Tomorrow has enough worries of its own.

HL: What advice do you have for parents feeling alone in their walk with disabilities?

LW: First, remember that God sees you. He loves you. As unknown and lonely as the road may feel, you're never truly alone. Second, remember you're made for community. While you might not know a parent with a child who has the exact same diagnosis your child has, try to find others on a similar path. These days, the Internet is a wonderful place to find groups where you can swap stories, tips, treatments, and encouragements. You also need in-person community. Find parents through your church, therapy, or schools that you can talk to, problem solve with, and offer hope to as you navigate the world of disabilities.

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HL: What should a parent do in the grocery check-out line when their child innocently asks, “What’s that?” when referring to adaptive equipment?

LW: The best thing you can do is stay calm and model the right behavior. Our young children look to us to help them understand the world. They need us to show them what is good, bad, safe, and unsafe. While our natural instinct might be to shush the child and move quickly away, this teaches that discussing the topic of disabilities is off-limits or that disabilities themselves are unsafe or bad. Instead, offer a warm smile and a straightforward answer: “That’s a wheelchair; it gives them the freedom to get where they want to go!” Then, it’s always a great idea to show the child sameness, to help them see that the person with disabilities isn’t so different from them. “That wheelchair is blue. Blue is your favorite color! How cool is that?” By speaking in this way, you give honor to the person with a disability, and you train your children to see disability through God’s eyes.

HL: How can parents springboard important conversations surrounding disability?

LW: These days there are a lot of positive representations of disabilities and adaptive equipment in books, shows, and media that you can take time to explain to children. Ask what your child noticed, consider Googling the adaptive equipment to learn more, and ask: “What was God-honoring about how they treated the person with a disability?” “What didn’t honor God?” In addition, there are many new, great resources out there that explicitly teach and train children about the topic of disabilities. This is my hope and prayer for my new storybook, *Like Me*.

HL: How do we ask parents questions about their child’s disabilities and not be insensitive?

LW: In most cases, it’s best to allow the person with a disability or caregiver to bring it up first. If you’ve talked about it with the parent or caregiver before and you would like to show you care, here are some questions that are fairly general in nature and allow room for them to engage in deeply, or not.

- What’s your child working on in therapy right now?
- How do you feel about your child’s progress or goals?
- Do you have any doctor appointments coming up? I’d love to pray for her!

This isn’t a question, but it’s unbelievably encouraging: “Hey, I love seeing how your child does [fill in the blank]! It’s been amazing to see how awesome he is doing at [fill in the blank]!” Taking time to notice and enjoy the child does wonders for the parent’s heart.

HL: How can the church and culture continue to become more understanding, sensitive, and loving toward individuals with developmental disabilities?

LW: Incredible progress has been made for inclusion for people with disabilities. But often, inclusion looks like the same thing as tolerance. It looks like a handicapped parking stall or being pleased to see disability representation in the latest blockbuster film. These are good things, but they’re the baseline. True inclusion looks like friendship. It looks like sharing more than just a smile and inviting a person with a disability into the conversation or altering a game so everyone can play. It means going up to a new family in the church who has a child with a disability, asking, “How can we make your time successful here?” and doing your best to honor their requests. It means not moving away from someone who makes different movements or vocalizations that you’re not used to or telling a mother if she just has enough faith, God will heal her child.

Some of the ways we can do this is through building a robust theology of disabilities, understanding its practicalities, reading articles like these, and studying disability history because it’s often not taught in schools. It’s easy to

see disabilities as an issue of charity, or “doing the right thing” to feel good about ourselves, but it’s far more than that. When we have a thin understanding of disabilities, we miss out on so many incredible relationships — and true friendships.

HL: How can we improve our language when talking about people with disabilities?

LW: Disability language is ever evolving and is somewhat subjective to each individual, which I know makes this hard! My general encouragement is to use the term “disability,” then mirror the language of the person who has the disability, or if they are a child, their family member or advocate. Every person who is personally touched by a disability will have their preferred terms, but in general, “disability” is a safe and honoring word to start with.

HL: How does your new storybook teach kids how to understand and love those with disabilities?

LW: *Like Me* is a fiction picture book for children that helps them understand what it looks like to be in a family that has a child with disabilities and how to interact with someone who might move, act, or speak differently than others. *Like Me* shows children what a privilege it is to know another person — no matter what he or she looks like or how this person acts — discovering the deep, transcendent connection they share with another person because we’re all made in the image of God. The book is designed to foster conversations about disabilities in families, both for those who have a personal connection, and those who simply want to teach their children about this important topic.

HL: Church and culture at large are focused on noticing and celebrating differences right now. But you say it’s important to focus on sameness too. Tell us about this.

LW: I’m very grateful for the difference conversations — they’re so important! Yet, science and sociology have discovered that any time a friendship is made — no matter how different two people are — they form the friendship not because of their

differences, but because of at least one thing they found that was the same. Maybe it’s the same favorite food or type of humor, but whatever it is, friendship starts with sameness. And this is the beautiful thing about understanding God’s design. As Christians, we know that every person was made in the image of God. This means we have an inherent, transcendent sameness with every person on the planet, and we can be friends with anyone! □

Like Me A Story About Disability and Discovering God’s Image in Every Person

by Laura Wifler and Skylar White

“God made you. God loves you. God is kind to you.”

It can be hard for children to take those three life-changing truths into their hearts and treat others with love and understanding, especially when they encounter those whose needs differ drastically from theirs.



Through a sibling’s eyes, young readers will tag along on a day of a child with a disability. As the two siblings play with friends, go to therapy, and spend time with family, relatable comparisons will help children understand a different type of family life, building empathy for children with disabilities along the way.



Open the door to meaningful talks with your child about empathy, compassion, diversity, and God’s love for them and others.

Like Me is available at lifeway.com.

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Laura Wifler is the cofounder of Risen Motherhood and serves as the executive director and co-host of the podcast. She is the co-author of the bestselling book, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*, among others, including her most recent children’s book, *Like Me: A Story About Disability and Discovering God’s Image in Every Person*.

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