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I came across a story that was published years ago in the Christian Reader about a father who touched his children's lives in an unexpected, yet special way.

As his father walked into the living room, the boy noticed that his younger brother, John, began to cower. The older boy sensed that John had done something wrong, and then he saw it. Little John had opened their father's brand new hymnal and scribbled all over the first page with a pen. Staring at their father fearfully, both brothers waited for John's punishment. Their father picked up his prized hymnal, looked at it carefully and then sat down without saying a word. Books were precious to him, and the boys expected the worse.

What the father did next surprised them both. Instead of punishing or scolding John, the father took the pen from the little boy's hand, and wrote alongside the scribbles that John had made: "John's work, 1959, age 2. How many times have I looked into your beautiful face and into your warm, alert eyes looking up at me and thanked God for the one who has now scribbled in my new hymnal. You have made the book sacred, as have your brother and sister to so much of my life."

The author of the story, now an adult, goes on to say how that hymnal became a treasured family possession, how it was tangible proof that their parents loved them, how it taught the lesson that what really matters is people, not objects; patience, not judgment; love, not anger.]

I've read that there are four elements we need in our childhood to teach us such lessons and allow us to experience joy as an adult. The first element is unconditional love from at least one adult in our lives. This unconditional love gives us self-esteem and encourages us to see the world as a friendly place.]

The second element is discovering our passions through play. Most of us in our unstructured play time discover where our true talents and passions lay. Some children take joy in telling stories, or building backyard forts, or taking the toaster apart. These early play times are a great indicator of that child's later interests.

The third element involves practicing and mastering these interests, talents, and passions. This honing and mastering of particular skills increases a child's self-confidence and makes them less afraid to try new things. And finally, a child needs to experience positive recognition from others. Children learn what they live. As the saying goes, "If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves. If children live with acceptance and friendship, they learn to love the world."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every child could experience each of those four elements? Wouldn't

it be wonderful if every adult could, too? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all learn to like ourselves and love the world?