

## Are We Basically Good?

Alright, are you ready for one of the most important questions you will ever ask, in order to understand humanity? Here it goes... Are people basically good?

To me, the answer has always been so obvious, that I have been startled by the fact that a lot of people think we are basically good. Now, let me make clear as a bell, I am not saying we're basically *bad*. That's not my argument – I've been misquoted on this so often, I want to deal with it at the outset. We are not born basically bad, either. We are born - if you will - in the middle. Not basically good, though; we are born *innocent*, but not good.

Babies are not good. They're beautiful, they're adorable, their innocent – but they're not *good*. “I want mommy; I want milk; I want to be held; I want to be comforted, and if you do not do these things immediately, ***I will ruin your life!***” That, folks, is not goodness; that is pure narcissism.

We are born narcissists, preoccupied with “number one – with ourselves.” And that's the way we are when we are kids. Come on folks, have you ever worked with kids? You're going to tell me kids are basically good? Oh, my God, have you ever seen the cruelty kids inflict on one another? Adults never act like that. I was a counselor at camp for many years; what I saw in my bunks; the way kids would sadistically treat another kid – make fun of some kid with some sort of infirmity. Oh, come on; people aren't basically good. We don't start out that way.

How many of you have yelled at your kid, “Now listen here – you share too much! You have to learn to be more selfish.” “Stop saying 'Thank you' so much.” The idea is absurd. I don't know how many times I told my kids to say “thank you,” because gratitude doesn't come naturally. The simple notion of gratitude – of being grateful for all you're given – doesn't come naturally. We have to be made into good people.

With all the love in the world, you're still not necessarily going to be good. In fact, without discipline, and without values, if all you're given is love, you may end up a well loved barbarian. Which is what has happened to lot of people in my generation, and the next generation as well.

No, we don't start out basically good. We don't start out basically evil, either. There are no evil babies. I've never seen a baby's picture up at a post office, wanted for some crime. Of course not. But we're not basically good. So, what does that mean? Once you understand that, life becomes far more understandable, and then we can make the world a lot better.

How do you make a good world, if you don't know what you've started out with? We have to understand what we're beginning with, and we're not beginning with all goodness. And what does this mean in the way people understand life? Well, very simple. If people commit crimes, the people who think that people are basically good, blame society. After all, why would a good person go and hold up a supermarket? They *must* have been perverted by society. And there are a

lot of people who believe that. For example, that poverty causes crime. Now, yes, if you have no money and you're about to starve, and you steal bread, then poverty caused the crime.

But in general people steal television sets. They're not doing it because of poverty; they're doing it because of *bad values*. And that's the whole issue: the *values* issue.

Do we give kids values when we raise them, or do we believe that just giving them love is enough? That's a very different way of approaching the world, and a way of understanding good and evil.

Why do people commit evil? It's because they have made a choice to do something bad. Especially in a decent society, like let's say modern America. I don't blame modern America when somebody goes out and robs and kills, or rapes. I blame the person who did it. This is one of the most important questions in the world.

I know a lot of people like to cite Anne Frank, the teenage Jewish girl, who was ultimately sent to a concentration camp by the Nazis, and her diary's become world famous. And she wrote there that when all is said and done, she believes that people are basically good. But she was 15-years old, and she was incredible, and her murder is unbelievably tragic and evil, but she wasn't wise about human nature.

What are we are deep down? Neither *good* nor *bad*, and that is why making good people is the single most important project in human life.