

**Barbie and Our Reason for Being**

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In the eyes of a loving Creator, we are intrinsically ‘enough.’

*Barbie* is a delight.

From the script by director Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach to the cinematography by Rodrigo Prieto to the art direction, costumes, music, pop-culture references, and hysterical acting, the movie masterfully delivers pleasure, satisfaction, tenderness, connection, meaning, and joy.

Barbie dolls are emblematic of female childhood. The idea and image of Barbie has been empowering, impactful, controversial, and even problematic. Yet *Barbie*, the movie, invites us to rest in the loving delight found at the intersection of healthy identity and purpose.

For Stereotypical Barbie (Margot Robbie), life is perfect in Barbie Land, until unexpected changes prompt her to seek answers in the real world. Ken (Ryan Gosling) tags along. Together, though each in their own way, they go on a journey of self-realization and healing.

Ken’s character arc is the most amusing. As the film’s narrator (Helen Mirren) tells us, “Ken has a great day only if Barbie notices him.” Ken’s whole identity and existence revolve around Barbie. He doesn’t even have an occupation. The Barbies have jobs: they’re doctors, astronauts, even the president. Not so for Ken. He tells Doctor Barbie (Hari Nef), “My job is just beach.”

In the real world, Ken discovers patriarchy and initially feels valued by holding all the power. He decides to recreate patriarchy in Barbie Land, but it turns out that’s not the answer. He misses Barbie. “It’s Barbie and Ken. There is no just Ken!”

Ken hits rock bottom, then has a breakthrough while practicing lament. In a ludicrous and epic musical number reminiscent of the ballet fights of *West Side Story* and the rock-and-roll auto-tech spectacle of *Grease*, Ken sorts out his issues. Singing “I’m Just Ken,” a 1980s-style power ballad, he belts out, “Doesn't seem to matter what I do / I'm always number two.” But by the end he and all the other Kens realize that there’s nothing wrong with being just Ken. “I’m just Ken / and I’m enough / And I’m great at doing stuff,” he sings. “So, hey, world, check me out, yeah, I'm just Ken.” Ken learns that he doesn’t have to earn love, that his identity and purpose don’t depend on Barbie or doing beach. He is his own doll, and as such, he can feel safe in being valued and loved for just being Ken.

While Ken’s struggle is partly related to the fact that no one expects much of him, Barbie is burdened by all the expectations placed on her as a female role model. As an idea, Barbie has multiple identities and purposes, all of which have been imposed on her. They come from what she can do for others. Rather than a bombastically existential musical number, Billie Eilish’s “[What Was I Made For?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cW8VLC9nnTo)” serves as Barbie’s internal monologue. Since Barbie can’t meet everyone’s expectations, she feels empty and lost. “I used to know but I'm not sure now / What I was made for,” Eilish sings. “Think I forgot how to be happy . . . Something I wait for / Something I'm made for.” Barbie’s longing for a sense of identity and intrinsic enoughness echoes in those lines.

Throughout the film, Barbie expresses and challenges the contradictions and burdens of external and internal expectations. Eventually, she learns that enoughness doesn’t come from an occupation or how well she performs what others think she should be. She is enough, not because “she can be anything.” She is enough simply because she is. She doesn’t have to be Astronaut Barbie or Perfect-Role-Model Barbie. She can be content being just Barbie.

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In [Matthew 18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+18%3A+1-5&version=NIV), the disciples ask Jesus, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus invites a child into their midst and tells them that if they don’t become like children, not only will they not be the greatest, they won’t even make it into the kingdom. Jesus tells them to be childlike!

So, what are children like? What’s their identity and purpose?

Children just are. When we are kids, we don’t have the capacity to be anything other than ourselves. Children are vulnerable, imaginative, creative, honest, playful, expressive, sometimes difficult, sometimes exhausting, full of wonder, and incredibly open to delight. How many times have you exhausted yourself repeating something a child thought was funny, because the child still cracks up in high-pitched squeals every time as if it’s the most delightful thing they’ve ever experienced!

Purposelessness is children’s highest purpose. They don’t come into the world with an agenda. Their natural inclination is to rest assured in the love they receive. And not because they earned it, as they certainly don’t do anything productive for others. No. Children’s identities rest in being beloved and enough. They are unconditionally loved and delighted in just because they exist.

While Jesus calls the disciples into humility, he also invites them to rest in God’s unconditional love for and delight in them. He’s saying, “You don’t need to worry about being the greatest. Instead, delight in God’s delight in you.” Jesus invites them into creativity, co-creating, and co-imagining with God and with one another.

Like Barbie, like Ken, we might feel that we need to have a specific identity or do certain things to earn God's love, but God loves and delights in us simply for the fact that God created us. In the [Genesis narrative](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201&version=NIV), the universe is created through cosmic make believe. God creates humanity by playing with mud. Humanity is born out of imagination, play, and the community and love of the triune God. As created beings, those qualities are intrinsic to us. In Genesis we see a God whose very essence as creator and parent calls us into childlikeness, a God who calls us into just beingness, a God who invites us to rest in God’s delight. And not only is that enough, it is “[very good](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A31&version=NIV).”

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