

Seven Helpful Tips on Child Care

I want to start by apologising for my apparent outburst at our equipment and computer operator last week.

The first part of the problem was my error. When it seemed my remote was not working, or that the operator was falling behind, the problem was in how I created the presentation slides.

Then, the monitor stopped displaying the slides to my view. I thought the presentation program had crashed, but did not realise you all could still see my slides. It took the operator and myself a few moments to realise the problem.

In the midst of my frustration at these kerfuffles, I spoke unintentionally harshly to the operator, so I beg you all, and he, to accept my apology.

The Death of a Master Chef

To begin my reflections on our scripture focus, I want to draw your attention to the death of Jock Zonfrillo. This came as a shock to many people, especially the fans of the reality cooking show *Masterchef Australia*.

Zonfrillo was a charismatic media personality, a celebrated chef, a successful and creative restaurateur. However, he spoke openly of his mental health struggles and addictions due to the stresses of restaurant work. On the set of *Masterchef*, he was always seen with worry beads, a device commonly used for controlling anxiety.

While the cause of death has not been released to the media or public, it is known that his wife, Lauren, became concerned when he did not return their usually scheduled calls. She contacted the police and requested a welfare check. The police arrived at his hotel room in the early hours of Monday morning (1 May 2023), to find him dead. No drug paraphernalia was reportedly located, no one else was in the room, and police came to the conclusion Zonfrillo had died of natural causes. In my estimation, these details make his death likely an act of suicide.

“To be, or not to be” is the opening phrase of a speech given by Prince Hamlet in the so-called “nunnery scene” of William Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1. In the speech, Hamlet contemplates death and suicide, weighing the pain and unfairness of life against the alternative, which might be worse. The opening line is one of the most widely known and quoted lines in modern English literature, and the speech has been referenced in many works of theatre, literature, and music.

It may be the case that very question was on Zonfrillo’s mind and he answered it in the negative.

If I am correct, that such a well-regarded person cannot find a reason to be in the meaning and purpose provided by such a successful life, then, yet again, we have proof the lust, the flesh, the eyes and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16) cannot satisfy. We crave more than what this fallen world offers.

What & Why?

Maybe we think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Maybe we are just not as mature nor as wise as we would like to believe.

Children want so badly to grow up and be treated like adults. Maybe we need to accept that, like children, we need support and guidance, care and comfort, from a parental figure. Maybe we need to seek and maintain attachment to a higher power.¹

Explanation

During this season of Easter we are looking more closely at the appearances of Jesus to his disciples during the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension. During that time, Jesus met with the disciples to speak with them and teach them in a more focussed manner about the kingdom of God and what would be required of them to continue his ministry.

To get a glimpse of what he taught them, we are investigating some of the recurring metaphors of the Bible.

Last week we considered what the Good Shepherd says about his sheep. Resonating with that metaphor, the apostle John wrote in his gospel,

He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God... (John 1:10–12b)²

Today, let us meditate on the metaphor of *the children of God*; specifically, let us consider seven helpful tips on child care we find in the Bible.

The Pure Word Should Be Our Daily Bread

Our scripture focus from the *First Letter of Peter* draws our attention to this metaphor, when Peter wrote,

Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, (1 Peter 2:2)

The first helpful tip, therefore, is **the pure word should be our daily bread**.

To this end, Jesus encouraged his friends to pray:

Give us each day our daily bread. (Luke 11:3)

Of course, children need nourishment they cannot provide for themselves. So too, the friends of Jesus need temporal, as well as spiritual, nourishment. Where then do we find this bread daily? Jesus said,

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. (John 6:51a)

Jesus indicated we are provided nourishment not only *from* him, but that *he himself is nourishment* to his friends. Further to this, Jesus said,

This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:58)

This is a confusing metaphor, but Jesus was describing himself as nourishment, not merely satisfying our physical needs, but providing for our spiritual needs.

How do we get this “daily bread” of which Jesus spoke?

Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

We get this nourishment by reading, studying and meditating on the Bible, daily preferably. In and through it, seeking the convicting and teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is in this way we become equipped and able to discern the truth of the human condition, become familiar with the good news about Jesus and knowledgeable in the ways of the free, full and forever life he promised. We are then able to speak truth to power and, most importantly, to lead the last, the least, the lonely and the lost to become children of God themselves.

Children Must Have Communication

The next helpful tip for child care is that **children must have communication**. Through both verbal and non-verbal forms, words and touch, a bond with caregivers is forged through communication.

For the friend of Jesus, that bond is forged by the communication of prayer, as it is written,

Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up. (Luke 18:1; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17.)

Through prayer, if we are open and honest with our Father God, then the Holy Spirit will do its work deep in our souls, communicating and impressing upon us the will of God, as well as providing all we need to endure, that the friend of Jesus might pass the test, living a Christian lifestyle with courage and confidence.

It is in this way prayer is a two-way communication, not one-sided as is commonly thought.

Children Must Have Exercise

Another helpful tip is **children must have exercise**. In other words, the friends of Jesus get busy doing God's work (Jn 9:4).

The psalmist David wrote,

Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim that he has redeemed them from the power of the foe (Psalm 107:2)

The primary, but not the only, work of the friends of Jesus is the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19), which is achieved when we are his “witnesses, to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8), proclaiming what he does in us and for us to rescue us from the power of sin and curse of death.

The Spirit provides the power for such work, and our practice makes us fit for the task. So, get to exercising!

Children Need Rest

The fourth tip we find in the Bible is **children need rest**. After all our hard work at exercising our gifts, we must remember *who we are is much more important than what we do!*

Placing our faith in Jesus and living a Christian lifestyle does not exercise us to exhaustion nor work us to burnout. When we read, study and meditate on the Bible, we learn to rely on Jesus, the Word of God. In this we find rest, for as it is written,

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29)

If our Christian experience is busy, leaving us harried, we are doing it wrong! Echoing this point, the psalmist David wrote,

Be silent before the LORD and wait expectantly for him... (Psalm 37:7)

The Christian lifestyle is lived with and in Christ; therefore, we rely on his strength, as much as his will and word. We seek his indwelling patiently, expectantly, restfully.

Children Must Have Clean Surroundings

The next helpful tip is **children must have clean surroundings**. To this end, the apostle Paul wrote,

Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord; do not touch any unclean thing, and I will welcome you. (2 Corinthians 6:17)

When the biblical writers advise the children of God to “be separate”, they do not mean by *proximity* but by *practice*. The children maintain clean surroundings by practising a Christian lifestyle in accordance with Jesus’ instructions, which are overwhelmingly good for us. This is a lifestyle for which we do not need to be ashamed because, by it, the children enjoy all the promises of the Father!

Similarly, the brother of Jesus wrote,

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)

The Christian lifestyle does not consist of loving God by attending church once a week, but includes loving our neighbour AND staying consistent in right morals, which keeps the children of God clean from the stain of sin.

Children Should Have Regular Checkups

The next helpful tip is **children should have regular checkups**. The apostle Paul noted this himself when he wrote,

Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Describing the context of sharing the Lord’s Supper, which is an act of worship, the child of God examines him or herself honestly and thoroughly, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal whether there are any tendencies within us that lead us to deviate from the commands of God.

Further, in verse 31, the apostle elaborated,

If we were properly judging ourselves, we would not be judged, but when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:31–32)

If a child of God is honest and earnest with such a checkup regularly, then we would find no reason to deviate from the good, pleasing and perfect will of the Father (Rom 12:2).

Children Must Have Love and Care

The final helpful tip for child care we find in the Bible is that **children must have love and care**. A young child in Christ finds this love and care by finding a good Church.

The writer of the *Book of Hebrews* wrote,

not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.
(Hebrews 10:25)

It is easy to become discouraged by the fallenness of this world that leads us into sin, destroying hearts and minds and lives. A child cannot withstand the onslaught of this bitter reality without love and care. We need encouragement.

We find encouragement, support, and wisdom from pastors, spiritual mentors, and the fellowship of other Christians. The Father provides for his children!

Conclusion

When Jesus met with Peter and other disciples on that beach, he fed them and ministered to Peter's broken soul. In this way, he loved, cared for, provided a checkup, gave them rest, and invited them to exercise by continuing his work in the world. Jesus wanted them to grow up into their salvation.

The time between his resurrection and ascension was, for Jesus, an opportunity to teach the disciples very intentionally and specifically, so as to prepare them to become his apostles. As such, they set a foundation for a ministry of reconciliation that would see the last, the least, the lonely and the lost rescued and redeemed, reconciled and restored to God, our Heavenly Father.

To accept God as our Heavenly Father requires us to place our faith in Jesus, that we might be adopted and accepted as children of God.

Like the metaphor of sheep, the metaphor of children may not seem like an attractive image, but consider your position in this world, the effect of the human condition on your own soul and life.

Like children, you likely want to grow up and be taken seriously as an adult, independent, confident, master of your own life.

Yet, like adult children who discover they need the support and care of a loving family throughout our lifetime, when we acknowledge our dependence on our heavenly Father, we discover his plans and his purposes are far better than our own, that he knows us better than we know ourselves, that he is guiding us toward a meaning and purpose that is substantial, that is something worth living for.

If you have tasted that the Lord is good, come to him daily, for he has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. You are God's people, children in his family, who have received mercy and all that the care a child needs.

Endnotes

- 1 This sermon is based on an outline provided by Billy Bryant, "Seven Helpful Tips on Baby Care", *Golden Nuggets* 7, ed. Maze Jackson (1971).

- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).