

**10 THINGS MY
CHILDREN
TAUGHT ME
ABOUT GOD**

By Susan Barnes

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First Words

“Dada, dada. Dada, dada,” practiced my 10-month-old.

When our babies say their first word, we are delighted and often record the date. As toddlers begin to talk we don't criticise them for incorrect pronunciation or bad grammar. We are so thrilled to hear their attempts at communication, that we don't consider the imperfections of their words. Children talk about whatever is on their mind, at any time of day or night. They are blunt and honest. They don't feel the need to hide their motives nor are they embarrassed by their inadequacies.

In a similar way, God is thrilled to hear from his children. Our prayers don't have to be eloquent speeches or formal recitals, but simply a genuine attempt to communicate. Jesus lived on earth as a man and experienced all the emotions that we do, so he is able to empathise with us. We can talk to him whenever we like, about whatever is on our minds, our frustrations, disappointments and anxieties. We have a God who not only hears, but understands and feels our pain.

God longs to hear the honest cries of your heart, and he is only a simple prayer away.

Being Careful

"I'll be careful," said my five-year-old, standing perilously close to the edge.

"But I said, come away."

When our children are doing something dangerous we don't want them to be careful, we want them to be compliant.

Likewise, we may say to God, "I'll be careful to live a good life so I can go to heaven." Yet, rather surprisingly, this isn't what God asked us to do.

Instead, God asks us to come to him with open hearts and minds to receive his gift of salvation—a gift made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection. When we accept this gift, we are forgiven and enter into a relationship with God for all eternity. Jesus is the way to God. No one comes into relationship with God except through him (John 14:6).

It's not our prerogative to invent a system of salvation that is dependent on our hard work, effort or self-sacrifice. Rather, we accept the system of salvation that God has put in place—one that is based on Jesus' work and his sacrifice.

God isn't looking for carefulness, he is looking for those who willingly accept his gift and enter into relationship with him.

God Sees

"You can't see me," he says, gingerly moving around the room with his eyes shut.

The misconceptions of childish thinking are often amusing, however sometimes we unwittingly do the same thing in our relationship with God. We think that God is uninterested, unavailable or unconcerned with the dubious desires going on in our hearts. We are like the child who hides by shutting his eyes—we say, "God can't see me."

But God, like the parent, can see perfectly well. In fact, he can see our lives more clearly than we do because God looks beyond the obvious and perhaps this is the real reason why we hide. We are comfortable the way we are, but God longs to purify our motives. Those unhealthy impulses that drive us which are so involuntary, so instinctive and so inevitable.

God would love to bring light to our spiritual blind spots, faith to our heart and hope to our souls, so we can understand how clearly he sees us, how perfectly he knows us and how deeply he cares. May God open our eyes, our hearts, our minds—our very souls—to the pervading knowledge of his great love for us.

Will you come?

"Will you come with me, Mum?" she asked on the first day of school.

When our children have to face something unknown or frightening, it is a comfort to have a familiar adult, whom they love and trust, to go with them. Often this person doesn't need to say a word—their presence is enough.

As adults, we need this too. When we go to a worrying medical appointment, or face a difficult relationship issue, or are required to attend a challenging meeting. It's a comfort to know we aren't alone. Perhaps this is why the most often recorded command in the Bible is; "fear not." The reason we are told not to fear is because God is with us. Sometimes this doesn't feel like enough. We want something more tangible and there are times when God will send someone to be with us.

However if God is all we have, then he is enough. Acknowledging that God loves us and stands with us as we face the unfamiliar, the uncharted, or the unknown, is a great comfort.

God's desire is to be with us. Let's welcome his presence and know he is there for us.

It's Not Fair

"It's not fair," he said stamping his little foot.

It's true. Life is often not fair. Our circumstances are often determined by where we are born, when we are born, and to whom we are born.

Sometimes it even seems like God is playing some sort of cruel game with his creation where things don't turn out fairly. Tragic things happen to people who are respectable, honest and decent citizens. While those who are guilty avoid justice and continue to commit horrendous crimes. It's hard to understand how a God of love can let this happen.

When we struggle to come to terms with a world that's not fair, it's tempting to blame God. However, he played by his own rules. He restricted himself to working within his creation to bring about salvation for us. Jesus, God's sinless son, innocent of any crime, died on a cross. He experienced an unjust trial, rejection from those who knew him best, abuse and humiliation from harsh soldiers, and a premature death in the cruellest possible way.

Jesus, out of love and godly justice, went beyond what was fair, so that we could be in a relationship, that's not equitable.

Puppets

"Look Mum, my puppet's waving."

"Look Mum, his mouth opens and shuts."

"Look Mum, now he's dancing."

However, the strings soon became tangled and he grew tired of it—a puppet that was enjoyed one minute and forgotten the next.

Despite the frustrations of parenthood, we wouldn't turn our children into puppets that we control one minute and forget the next. We'd like our children to grow into the unique people they are. We love their individuality and their idiosyncrasies. We don't want to squash their creativity or their distinctiveness.

Likewise, God doesn't want puppets. He created us with the ability to choose, think, reason and make decisions. God didn't create us with strings he could pull to make us perform.

Puppets cannot choose to be in a relationship, but we can and this is what God desires. People who will freely choose to share life, who live and laugh and linger in his presence. He wants to live in us and refine us, but not take over the personality he gave us.

Furthermore, he doesn't forget us if our lives are like a tangled mess of strings, but he will work with us to free and restore us.

Sting for a Moment

"It will only sting for a minute," said the doctor while giving the injection.

Once outside my son said, "my arm is going to hurt forever."

I smiled and assured him it wouldn't.

So often when I have been in pain, I've felt like it was going to go on forever—especially emotional pain where there are no pain killers. There seems to be no way to resolve the pain of broken relationships, or the grief of losing someone, or the sorrow caused by long term illness.

Support groups provide some help to people who have experienced similar pain and provide a safe space to share. People are encouraged when they know others understand their pain, but it's not always enough.

Jesus is my support group. Not only has he walked on earth and experienced the difficulties of living in a broken world, he has felt my unique pain because he is with me in an intangible way. I am helped because he knows me better than I know myself. He knows what triggers my pain and understands that even supportive words from fellow sufferers aren't enough. Jesus sustains and comforts me in times of need.

Why Mum?

“Why did grandpa die, Mum?” he asked for the hundredth time.

I took a deep breath. My previous answers obviously hadn't satisfied him.

“Well, ... that's just the way life is.”

Despite my desire to answer all of my children's questions honestly and thoroughly, sometimes I'm not able to explain life and death in ways they can understand. Children don't have the broad base of experience and knowledge to realise that life is more complicated than they imagine.

Could God possibly have the same problem with me? I've asked 'why' hundreds of times – why do I struggle with this relationship problem? Why do I strive without satisfaction? Why do I suffer inconvenient health issues? Maybe my finite understanding is too small to grasp his grand design. Perhaps I don't have the capacity to appreciate the plan, the pattern, or the plot of his larger story. Certainly my brief appearance on earth doesn't give me the time or space to plumb the depths of God's purposes.

So I remind myself that he is my Father and I am his child. I can trust that he is working for my good, even when I don't have the answers.

Not What You Know

"It's not what you know, it's who" said my teenager with a wink, after announcing his selection as captain of the basketball team.

It's a phrase often quoted when someone clinches a good job, gains an early promotion, or beats a competitor for a contract. It is amazing that in today's society, where so much emphasis is put on academic achievement and experience, a personal relationship can still outweigh other considerations. While a person may have brilliant knowledge and be proficient, they may not be a team player. The value of knowing someone personally, builds confidence that they are going to be a good fit for the task.

It's a statement that is particularly true of Christian faith. It's possible to have brilliant theological knowledge and a charismatic personality, but lack a personal relationship with God.

A Christian is not someone who wins awards for theology, or Bible memorisation or adherence to a set of rules. Their only credential is a relationship with God, made possible by Jesus Christ. They commit to following God and participating in his mission.

It doesn't matter how much you know about God, but it does matter that you know him.

I Can Explain Everything

"I can explain everything," said my teenager the night after an impromptu party.

Surveying the kitchen—the broken glasses, the empty bottles, the half-eaten cake and the muddy footprints—I doubted that he would be able to explain any of the mess in a way I would find satisfactory.

"I can explain everything," said my friend during a mix up in arrangements. I knew my friend to be compassionate and gracious. Despite my disappointment, I was confident that she could explain and there would be a good reason for my confusion.

When I survey the world, it's a mess. Broken lives, empty dreams, half-lived potential, muddy humanity—so much sadness and tragedy. I need a compassionate and gracious friend who understands my confusion and comforts me in my disappointment.

I have such a friend. His name is Jesus. He came from heaven and lived an earthly life with all its joys and sorrows. He is the friend who has the ability to offer me a satisfactory explanation for the mess in the world, in my community, and even in my life.

At the end of time he will say, "I can explain everything."