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Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Why children are a moral compass in this 'serious' world

SOME moments are precious beyond belief. They are those that you least expect, but when they happen they stay with you forever. Like a bolt from the blue, they alter how you perceive everything.

I was lucky to have one of those moments last week. Sitting in our kitchen with our middle son, I was lost in my own world. Then, out of nowhere, my son said: 'Why does God love little children so much?'

Seconds before, he was singing a cartoon theme song. If I was flabbergasted by his query, it was because it seemed so out of context. With a single leap, he went from Disney to theology.

Without shame or embarrassment, this innocent six-year-old had exhibited great faith. For him, God and love are certainties beyond doubt. They are the twin pillars that give him assurance and peace.

Before I could respond, my boy had already answered his own question: 'I think it is because they are so full of joy and happiness. Adults are sometimes not like that. They are always thinking about serious things and what is appropriate.'

And there it was, a moment so precious it could have stopped time. As I sat speechless, he had already returned to Disney.

As if to prove his point, one serious moment was immediately followed by an outpouring of joy and happiness.

I will never tire of saying that I have learned more about life from my children than from any other source.

Questions with which I have struggled forever, they have answered in an instant. That is because, as my little boy correctly observed, we adults are far too preoccupied with 'serious things'.

Children see the best in everything. They are slow to condemn and quick to praise. Their world is one of wonder and hope, of laughter and love. They bring light and levity to every situation.

Grandparents know this only too well. Having dispensed with the pressures of parenting, they can see their grandchildren for what they are. For so many, the time they spend with the grandchildren is a gift beyond compare.

Where there are children, there is joy and plenty of it. There is gentleness, affection and true love.

As a little hand rests on yours, it is as if the world is purged of all its problems.

A hug from a child and your cares seem to melt away.

When they laugh, it is like being immersed in sunshine. And in their little conversations, you see the

beauty of innocence and why it needs to be protected at all costs.

I don't think I exaggerate when I say that children redeem humanity. My boys make me want to be a better father and a better person. They have taught me the true meaning of love and sacrifice, of care and affection.

And when, each night, I kneel at their bedside, I give thanks for these little beings that have shown me what it means to live one day at a time. Thanks to them, I have let go of so much useless baggage, so many 'serious things' that, in the end, mean nothing at all. Now, I try to see the world through their eyes and it is beautiful to behold.

As parents, our job is to morally shape our children. I now realise, however, that we cannot grow as people unless we are shaped by them. They do not teach through theory, but simply by being who they are.

I often find myself smiling at our boys as they read or play. As I do, I think of how different life would be without them. They have given me back my childhood, my sense of wonder and my ability to laugh at things that might have previously crushed me.

That is why, in parenting, we not only give but we also receive. If we are open to it, we receive a form of love that can heal any hurt. We receive life-giving joy and an understanding of humanity that makes it all the more wondrous.

Most of all, we learn how to laugh – really laugh. In all things, you can discover light. In all people, you can find happiness.

At least, that has been my experience. I am living proof of the fact that, in children, we have the best moral guide we could possibly hope for. It is thanks to them that those of us who were once lost are now found.

HE was right: we are too often distracted by serious things. Of course, life is serious, but when viewed through the eyes of a child we can discover better ways of handling our difficulties. We see that to approach life with joy, to avoid condemnation and to praise where we can, is to drain our problems of their power.

It was a precious moment and I shall never forget it. As he sang his gorgeous little tune, I realised that the reason God why loves all children so much is because they don't let misery blind them to the beauty and joy that surrounds us.

They see the world as we should see it. They laugh as we should laugh and sing as we should sing.

They love as we should love and, having learned that lesson, we will find there is little else worth being serious about.

mark.dooley@dailymail.ie