

IT'S NOT EASY, is it, having small children and bringing up a young family? Of course, no one said it *would* be easy. In fact, they probably said it would be extremely hard; but before we really *knew* what it meant, we probably only had one ear open to those comments. "Yeah, I expect we'll be tired", we might have thought; but we probably never thought we would be *this* tired! "I suppose I'll have to give up some of my freedom", we might have mused; but we may not have thought about what it really meant, or that more or less complete surrender would be called for!

There's no doubt about it: having a young family is an exhausting business, probably more continuously draining of our energies than anything we shall have ever attempted before. This PS is written for young families, and contains a few thoughts about surviving and making the most of some of those pressures and opportunities.

A brother recently wrote to me, "These are your years in the midday sun". I had not really thought about it quite in those terms, but it's very true (and helpful to remember) that it won't always be like this. The children won't always be this small and demanding of attention. (Indeed, later on they probably won't want it!) Although later years will be stressful and challenging in *different* ways, things will change, and whatever tiredness we might feel as young parents now will not last forever. To say that children grow up so quickly is the ultimate commonplace; but that being true, it's important to push through the weariness and make the most of the unique positives of the present. The children won't want to jump on top of me forever as a young dad; and, although at times that might feel like good news, it's probably an 'all or nothing' matter where I should rejoice in the 'all' rather than complain about it before the 'nothing' arrives!

If Mum goes out to work then there are issues of subcontracted child-care and more evening domestic chores to navigate, which can bring their own pressure. If Mum stays at home she follows an excellent Scriptural precedent, but she may feel starved of adult company or intellectual stimulation during the business of the day, but then too tired to seek it when the kids have finally gone to bed. Again, it's an important issue to recognise and try to address in some way. One

option is to visit other brothers and sisters who might be about during the day, with kids in tow. Elderly brothers and sisters are either very polite or do genuinely seem to appreciate being visited by younger children—at least in small doses! Getting out to a class (Scriptural or otherwise), doing exercise or listening to an audiobook, even if for a very short period, can be a good way for Mum to get a break.

If Dad is busy in the ecclesia, and, particularly, on the speaking circuit, then it is very important he learns to say "No!" when necessary. A good potential solution here is to hand your diary to your wife and let her decide. She probably knows better than you how much speaking you should or shouldn't do!

As young parents we shall be tired often, and very busy. There simply is not enough time to do everything we might like to do in the evenings, once our responsibilities to God and family are properly discharged. We shall learn a lot about self-sacrifice, and the sooner we can accept in our own minds that *self*-sacrifice is the key—and that it is a good Biblical principle which we should be grateful to have the opportunity to learn—the easier it will be. If I can recognise that there is not time for everything, that I have to prioritise what really matters, it will help me eliminate other things that are peripheral, and not get frustrated about them.

It is important to remember that family life is not just about the children and should not be entirely focused on them. Mum and Dad existed as a unit before the children came along, and, God willing, they will exist as a unit after the children have left. How they treat each other during this time of extra stress and tiredness is important. Every family member is important and must be considered, and Mum and Dad should not feel bad if, in moderation, they each need some time for themselves.

Although these thoughts have focused on some of the pressures of a small family, it is important to think often about the immense blessings and opportunities family brings. The opportunity to raise a child and teach it the ways of God is an inestimable honour and privilege for which God is to be praised.

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