

BABIES ARE IMPORTANT

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One afternoon this week I spent two hours visiting a maternity hospital. Not that I spent all that time in the hospital itself. Rather, I was visiting a hospital out in the wilds of Essex. The ‘upside’ of the visit was that I was able to ‘kill two birds with one stone’ and visit two young women from church, both of whom gave birth round about the same time and then were placed in beds next to one another. Strangely, neither of them had known one another before – so I had to introduce them to one another. Of course, the main thing was to see the new-born babies. My custom, whenever a baby is born within the fellowship, to get to see the mother before she leaves hospital – that can take some doing when many mothers are released so soon. So, there I was, admiring the two babies, and praying for them and for their parents. Then off I sped back to Chelmsford.

On my return I found myself asking, “Was that really a good use of my time? Weren’t there better things for me to do? Couldn’t I have delegated this task to somebody else in the church? And what on earth did I achieve?”. As the pastor of a large and busy church, there are plenty of other things to do. There are people on my pastoral team who would have gladly have done the visit. And, apart from the prayer, there appeared to be little of ‘spiritual’ worth undertaken that afternoon.

However, maybe I should not be so negative. From a purely personal point of view, it is a real privilege to be involved with families in their joys, and indeed in their sorrows. Who else, but the pastor, is allowed this kind of access into people’s lives? Furthermore, from a spiritual perspective, visits such as these may convey to the parents concerned the importance children have in the family of God. Every time I take a dedication, I read the account of the time when the disciples sought to stop children coming to Jesus. Maybe my visits are a pale reflection of the fact that Jesus has time even for the most vulnerable and apparently insignificant.

Significantly, many now recognise that the early years not spent at school are just as important, if not more so, than the years spent at school. Psychologists tell us that a child’s educational potential is determined by the pre-school care it receives. Indeed, there are some who believe that by 22 months the die has already been cast for a child’s educational potential.

I wonder whether a child’s spiritual potential is also determined, at least in part, in those early years? I’m reminded of the words I use at every dedication service: “Today we want to affirm the key role that parents have in offering security to their children, and within that security allowing children to discover the security we all can have in God”..

So maybe my visit was important. My presence at the bedside perhaps underlined the importance of the spiritual dimension right at the very beginning of life.