



Dear Friends,

Recently, I began to look after my grandson. I felt apprehensive about doing it. Would I have the energy to keep up with him? Can I still change a nappy? What will I feed him?

My greatest fear was to know what to do with him. I'm not minding him with Kathryn present, so I can't tag team with her. I'm flying solo. And for a whole day! I don't have the imagination to keep a toddler occupied. Creativity is not my strong suit. How will I make it work, for both our sakes?

Thankfully, it didn't take me long to realise toddlers love routine and repetition. After only two weeks, we have already established a routine. After I arrive, the day starts with home play. I change his nappy before we walk to, and play at, the park. Then it's lunch time. Another nappy change. Then nap time – for him, not me, even though I feel like it! More play after a sleep. Finally, it's time for me to make my exit.

He likes me to read him the same books, to play the same games, to sing the same song, over, over, and over again. Some people find repetition tedious. To be honest, I find it comforting. I appreciate not having to find something new to read, to sing or to play with him every few minutes.

I'm not the only one to benefit from this love of repetition. He does, too. The more we do the same activity, the more he learns and takes in. He listens intently as I read the same book for a tenth time. He becomes more creative in the game that we play on repeat. He watches me like a hawk as I do the actions to the song, "Blind Man" for the fiftieth time. You think I'm exaggerating? Anyone who has cared for little kids for hours at a time knows exactly what I am talking about.

I grew up in an era that was dismissive of routine and repetition. Routine was considered boring. It was more fun to be spontaneous. I realised after having my own kids that children thrive on routine. Knowing what is happening next helps them feel settled and secure.

Repetition or rote learning was also frowned upon. It was thought to stifle creativity and impede individuality. That attitude flowed through to church. Reciting creeds and reading set prayers in church were thought to encourage an empty formalism in which people just go through the motions of saying words without thinking about what they are saying. Instead, it was more spiritual, more authentic to say or to pray what came into one's mind.

The older I get, the more I realise that repetition - specifically, memorising Scripture is good for the soul. Not just for pulling out at Bible study when you're trying to think of THAT verse which says THAT thing.

More importantly, memorising Scripture forms us spiritually. It's like practising the guitar, crocheting, riding a skateboard, soccer skills or a favourite video game. If you practice for long enough, the skill you're learning eventually comes to you automatically, so that you don't even think about it. Memorising Scripture helps me to trust Jesus when I am afraid or anxious, to obey him when tempted to sin, to be godly when I feel under pressure. Col 3:16 says:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit ...

I have challenged myself to learn the Beatitudes in Mt 5:3-10. What about you? Will you have a go at memorising Scripture? Here are some suggestions, apart from the Beatitudes. You could try learning the Lord's Prayer in Mt 6:9-13. Or Psalm 1 or Psalm 23. How about Romans 8:35-39? Challenge yourself, so that God's word dwells richly in you and is what you just do.

God Bless,
Mark Adams