

This edition includes an article based on the book, *I have to be perfect (and other parsonage heresies)* by Tim Sanford. The book is written for 'preachers' kids' including the very large subset of MKs. It could also be applied to other TCK groups where appropriate.

On page 5 there are references to some very useful free downloadable resources on emotional literacy for children and young people, kindly supplied by a colleague from another agency. This is an important subject especially in the current global situation.

On page 5 there are details of Polly Ho's recently updated book, *Off we go*, an activity book for children aged 3-8. The 2020 edition has extra sections including the topic of safeguarding.

A book that weeds your garden

The additional title for this book is *The preacher's kid's manual of the holy heresies you may have grown up with and how to find your way back to the truth*.

The intention was to write a review, but the re-reading of the book for that purpose deeply affected my own personal journey with God. Everything that follows is therefore a blend of a description of the book and some reflections.

Tim is an adult MK from a family of preachers and missionaries, with lengthy and varied experience as a professional counsellor for families in ministry. He therefore speaks about a world that he knows from the inside.

His down-to-earth, quirky and humorous style makes the book very accessible and engaging. However, do not be deceived into thinking that there is anything superficial here. For me, the best way of describing the effect of reading it is that of a garden being dug over and weeded. Plenty of 'weeds' remain in my life, but I am aware that they are there. I know that there is a Biblical strategy to deal with them, over time.

This book addresses deep and highly relevant issues affecting our MKs, and speaks powerfully into the lives of those whose childhoods were shaped by their parents' ministry.

Tim uses the illustration of a juke box to represent how the human mind works. Some readers may not be familiar with the idea of a juke box, but others will call to mind this remarkable contraption, popular in coffee bars and other public venues in the 1950's and 60's. About the size of a refrigerator, it housed a collection of popular music stored on vinyl records. For a small sum of money – just a few coins – customers could select and play their choice of music. Tim develops the theme of the juke box, explaining that the beliefs that we absorb in childhood are rather like the vinyl records. Something triggers them and they play....automatically.

The book is divided into three main sections:

1. *What's the problem...anyway?*
2. *What's the damage...really?*
3. *What's the solution...honestly?*

Section One points out that the healthiest way of reviewing the past identifies both the positive and the negative aspects. One does not necessarily invalidate the other – they simply exist, side-by-side. This section also considers the many influences on a child growing up – family, church, mission agency, surrounding culture – and the interaction between these influences.

Section Two discusses a series of 'holy heresies', or entrenched beliefs, absorbed in the growing-up years. These are categorised into three groups – those about myself, about the world, and about God. Here are some examples:

I have to be perfect.

I am only here for others.

I can ruin my dad's ministry.

God is disappointed in me.

The chapters relating to these heresies are short, punchy and down-to-earth. Where do these ideas come from? Tim indicates that the vinyl records are programmed into the juke box from an early age, and reinforced with repetition. What does that look like in practice? One example relevant to missionaries is the setting of priorities so that the ministry always comes first, Parents may intend to spend 'quality time' with their children, but it rarely actually happens. The 'ministry comes first' record becomes one of the standard repertoires in the juke box. As with other related records, it will

continue to manifest itself into adult life, and will rear its head whenever there is a trigger event.

The following quotation [p62] expresses the conclusion that may be drawn from a longer orientation towards 'ministry first'.

The world's need for an evangelist is more important than your need for a dad.

Imagine discussing this statement with a group of teenage or adult MKs. The tug-of-war represented here has been present in the lives of generations of missionaries. It is often challenging, especially for fathers, to fence off their ministry commitments so as to ensure that they can spend adequate time with their children. Yet it needs to be addressed, if we are to convey to our children that the God who loves every people group in the world also cares about them. Call to mind the story of Jesus healing the woman with the issue of blood, while on his way to visit the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue leader. [Luke 8:43-48]. This story powerfully expresses the truth that both the chronic, low-profile, low-status daily realities and the spectacularly urgent emergencies are worthy of God's care and attention. In this story, one does not eclipse the other. As followers of Jesus, we can seek to care for those who are closest to us and possibly taken for granted, as well as fulfilling our ministry commitments.

At one end of the spectrum of families in ministry, there are those whose commitment to the work may lead to neglect of the family's needs. At the other end, there are those whose emphasis on family life seriously limits their engagement in ministry. There may be occasions where the work has to take priority, but these seasons need to be balanced with carefully-guarded family time, including opportunities to relate one-to-one with each child.

In chapter 10, Sanford highlights the dilemma of being placed in an either/or situation – either you agree with absolutely everything that is going on, or you are perceived as a rebel. This kind of pressure can generate problems such as eating disorders, escaping into a fantasy world, or a complete numbness whereby nothing matters any more. Chapter 11 sets out with heart-rending clarity the progression from these reactions to the position of rejecting God altogether. A possible attitude is expressed like this:

How can He call himself righteous and tolerate all the junk you saw going on behind the scenes? (p75).

What a salutary lesson to missionary teams, leaders, parents, care-givers, counsellors and teachers...not to mention supporting churches. Once we realise that our children are experiencing the effects of this 'junk', or notice problems that were supposed to have been hidden from them, it is crucial to respond with repentance where necessary, approachability and a willingness to listen and talk. We can never guarantee that there will be no 'junk', but we can deal with it as it arises. We can foster realistic expectations – other Christians do let us down, and it can be a struggle to forgive.

Some of the issues affecting our MKs are in the area of safeguarding and child protection, and it is beyond the scope of this article to address these specifically. However these areas are part of Tim's ministry experience.

Section Three begins with 'assessing the damage', and Sanford points out that, as with recovery from frostbite, recovery begins by feeling the pain. He includes a short survey for the reader to complete, which gives an approximate indicator of emotional health and suggests action to be taken. This resource is also included in the appendix. Following this, Sanford goes on to explain that, armed with new awareness, it is possible to identify problems and begin to 'change the records' in the juke box. This is not a quick fix, but is likely to be a long, ongoing process.

A further chapter is devoted to assaulting the 'should' mentality which often drives those who have been brought up in a religious context. He seeks to replace the 'shoulds' with other options where there is a choice.....

I could....I would like....I choose to [p102]

In chapter 15 different levels of anxiety are identified, and strategies to deal with it are outlined.

Chapter 16 looks at forgiveness – what it is, and what it is not.

Forgiveness is a process, not an event...The greater the wrong, the greater and deeper the pain. The deeper the pain, the greater the damage or injury. The greater the damage, the longer it takes to heal. The longer it takes to heal, the longer it takes to fully forgive. [p126]

Sanford links together and explains six stages of forgiveness. There is nothing formulaic about this – it is deeply challenging. The lynch pin of the process is the transferring of the debt to God, and Sanford leads up to this in clear steps.

Forgiveness does not equal trust.

Forgiveness is yours to give. Trust is theirs to earn. Always. [p126].

Sanford's final chapter relates a little of his own journey into God – knowing Him, not just knowing about Him. As an experienced mountaineer and mountain guide, he expresses it like this:

My view of God has changed from the football field where the coach stands on the sidelines pushing, yelling and driving, to a mountain peak where the climbing guide encourages, respects and helps me up. We climb together.

I recommend Tim's book as an essential resource for parents, those involved in the pastoral care of missionary families, teachers, school principals and guidance counsellors, mission leaders and the MKs themselves. It is available as a paperback and on Kindle as follows:

In the UK

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Have-Be-Perfect-Parsonage-Heresies/dp/0966195302>

In the US

<https://www.amazon.com/Have-Be-Perfect-Parsonage-Heresies/dp/0966195302>

Gill Bryant

See the next page for the resources mentioned at the beginning of this issue.

Emotional literacy

Emotional literacy UFM

<https://www.ufm.org.uk/emotional-literacy/>

leading to

Northern Ireland Curriculum

http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/curriculum_microsite/pdmu/living_learning_together/home.asp

Off we go

Available free of charge from Polly at this email address:

2020offwego@gmail.com

Educare is a ministry of WEC International