

## 214 Parenting: message, mission, method

If you're a parent, what is the most important thing you want to convey to your children (whether that's little children or grown-up children)? That they are loved and accepted.

Insofar as you have any influence over your children, what is your aim for them? I'd suggest that you want them to learn how to live in love with others, to forgive others, and when they have fights and hurt one another, to restore those relationships.

We've got a **message** and a **mission**, so what's our **method** as parents? Difficult, isn't it? Do we set rules, do we allow them a free-for-all so they can learn what works and what doesn't – or somewhere in between? We could probably discuss this for hours.

What about a Loving Heavenly Parent? Well, it seems clear to me that, end to end, the Bible's message is one of love and acceptance – realism about evil, yes, but love and acceptance.

I would argue that God's **mission**, over the centuries, has been to gradually help humankind to learn how to live in harmony – as any good parent would – but here the analogy breaks down.

When a baby is born, they are absolutely dependent on us, and so we can exercise control. But as humans emerged from the Stone Age, it was survival of the fittest, kill or be killed. God has a very difficult parenting task, but as the Bible makes clear, God has an overall plan, starting from the promise to Abraham: "All peoples on the whole earth will be blessed through you (and your descendants)."

The **method** was to show us how to live in love with one another by actually coming and being born as a human, to demonstrate that it is possible to live in love.

The Bible also suggests that it isn't just a matter of educating people; there is such a thing as evil, and evil has to be defeated. People who have succumbed to evil have to be restored, but how? How are people to be forgiven and restored?

So, God's central **message** is love and acceptance; God's **mission** is to defeat evil and restore relationships; God's **method** is to overcome evil with good. Jesus took the full force of human evil – the worst that people could do to a fellow human – and triumphed over it, once and for all.

So what is our part in all this, as those who seek to follow Jesus? By our lives and our words, we show and tell God's love, acceptance, forgiveness and restoration through the life, death, resurrection and kingly reign of Jesus (something like that, anyway).

*But what I have reacted against is a church whose essential message is: "You are evil and you are rejected by God unless and until you believe the following... Only then can you be accepted by the loving God, otherwise you are condemned. That's what the Bible teaches!"*

That's basically what I communicated for almost 50 years. Not surprising that this 'good news' has largely fallen on deaf ears!