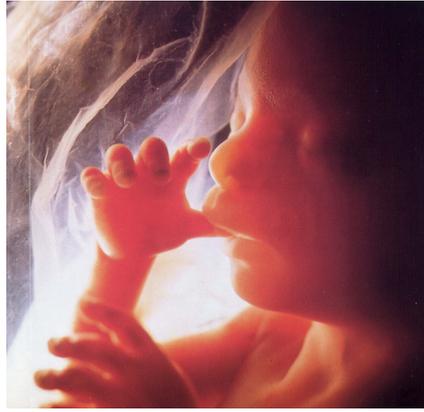


'Fearfully and Wonderfully Made'



At the EACH breakfast gathering there seems always one or another of us going overseas (and I'm not including Tasmania or New Zealand). I reckon that between our small group we have visited all the continents of the world and most countries. In this era of cheap air travel many of us will go to distant lands in our quest for experience, knowledge, understanding, variety, wisdom. But sometimes those far away discoveries will be dwarfed by the smallest and most everyday, local encounters.

Last week I was at the Boronia swimming pool. I was standing at the shallow end of the pool, adjusting my goggles, checking the clock, and trying to decide the maximum amount of time I would allow myself to swim forty laps. Then . . . I noticed in the lane next to me a small group of men and women with intellectual disabilities. Some were throwing a ball to one another, a couple of women were jumping up and down, squealing with delight. One man was standing alone, throwing handfuls of water over his chest, laughing and laughing.

What a difference a lane makes.

For them, the joy of being in the water.

For me, the need to know how many minutes and seconds it takes me to swim a lap x 40 = < or > than my previous best time which = my progress and therefore my credibility as a swimmer (and perhaps most disturbing of all, I'm not even training for an event!).

We certainly need goals; we need to be challenged and stretched; to grow the gifts we've been made stewards of; to refine the skills we've learnt. Our strength-based culture is a good setting for doing this.

But as we magnify our strengths do we not also magnify our weaknesses? As our strengths become a larger and larger part of who we are do they not cast an ever-increasing shadow of fear, anxiety, insecurity over what we might lose?

To the extent I have become my strengths it seems that I have also become my weaknesses. If I attach myself to the weight I lose so I attach myself to the weight I might gain or am gaining. The larger my victory the more terrified I become of a defeat.

At EACH we practice a strength-based model of recovery; encouraging a person to identify their strengths and to build upon these. But in doing this we have another task as well. To remind a person of the greatest strength available to them – the knowledge that they are 'fearfully and wonderfully made', complete as they are, loved, sacred. To live out of this truth is surely where our recovery, whether we are 'clients' or 'workers' or both, really flourishes; where our anxiety and insecurity about being 'good enough' begins to retreat. This is the discovery that we are neither our strengths nor our weaknesses. That we are neither the weight we gain nor the weight we lose, the jobs we are offered nor the jobs we lose; we are neither a successful marriage nor a failed one; we are neither our financial success nor our financial failure; we are neither the places we've been to nor that places that we have not.

We are not any of these because we are never *just so* but only and always *just as we are* - 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:14)

James Godfrey
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