



## “Talk to *Me* Like That”

If I can offer myself completely in order to understand the mysterious inner world of a child, how much more available should I be in those moments when I seek to fathom the greatness of the Lord of the universe?

As a therapist who works with children on the autistic spectrum, my job has perks. For one, I get paid to play all day long. For another, I get to take my kids to work with me as therapeutic accessories. Rachel (age 6) and D.J. (age 4) are always eager to serve as peer play partners because it means they get to go check out some other kid’s cool toys. I like it because it provides me a natural laboratory in which to mediate child-to-child interactions and prepare my clients for the world of playground politics.

My daughter is especially fantastic during these play dates. She has such patience and is able to make space in her own agenda for a child with limited adaptability. She watches everything I do and has learned how to be an animated and interesting play partner. She can often open and close more circles of communication with a client than I can.

This same observant six-year-old also notices that mommy gives 100 percent at work. There I become a clown or an angel. Airplane or bulldozer. Black bear or Santa Claus. I will do acrobatics if I believe it will open up new areas of interest and social problem-solving for the children on my case load. This is “fun mommy.” A mommy quite different from the mommy who gets home from work and couldn’t host another imaginary tea party if her life depended on it.

I wasn’t sure if Rachel was aware of my Jekyll-and-Hyde dilemma until a couple of weeks ago when we were heading to the Aquarium of the Pacific for a family fun day. In my mind, the fun wasn’t scheduled to start until we actually got to the aquarium, because I was trying to edit a report which was due for one of my clients. My husband was driving, and I had the dozen or so pages of the report spread out in front of me.

My children, on the other hand, were confused. They thought the fun had already started and every three seconds felt the urge to exclaim, “Oh, Mommy look at that!” “Mommy, do you see the train bridge?”

“Whoa...Mommy you missed it, it was a Union Pacific!” My response, “Uh-huh. Yeah. Cool,” while my eyes never left my report.

Suddenly Rachel’s voice changed. It grew softer, more reflective. “Mommy, I wish you talked to us like you do your autism kids.”

I felt the stone from David’s sling embed itself in my forehead. I desperately wanted to defend myself, but somewhere inside I knew she was right. The eternal question of priorities began to flood my frontal lobe, and I heard another voice at the back of my head saying, “Yeah, I wish you talked to *Me* like that, too.”

At that, I gave up all hope of defending myself, put my report down and began to look out the window. As I did, I reflected on why I give my clients every single ounce of my physical and emotional presence. Maybe it’s because they are such a mystery to me, and I desperately want to know who they are. Paradoxically, when I’m with my God, the Creator and Sustainer of my soul, the most mysterious Being I could ever encounter, I multi-task.

I pray while running, or driving, or drying my hair. Which isn’t bad really, the Bible says to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But sometimes I suspect that God, like Rachel, is a little saddened by my two-track mind. If I can offer myself completely in order to understand the mysterious inner world of a child, how much more available should I be in those moments when I seek to fathom the greatness of the Lord of the universe? How can I expect to comprehend the mystery of his being if I don’t give him my undivided attention?

I know God has enjoyed our encounters on mountain trails, black diamond slopes, even once at a U2 concert. But that day he reminded me that he also demands to be met with nothing between us. No laundry, no red lights, no sweat. So right now, I’m going to find a quiet space, get down on my knees, and say in a still, small voice. “I’m here. And I want to talk to You like that, too.” Will you join me? □

—Susan Reedy