

extra fingers

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Jesus said:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.”

from Luke 10:27

It's possible

ISABELLA, looking at the verse above that was printed on the side of a donation box: “Is that when he said it?”

DAD: “What’s that?”

ISABELLA: “Luke. Is that when Luke went and said those words? Because if he did how would they have known?”

DAD, trying not to laugh: “Known what?”

ISABELLA: “That it was 10:27 when he said it.”

DAD: “Issy. There weren’t any watches around in the olden days.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, I know. That’s what I’m saying.”

DAD: “That was two thousand years ago.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, I know. Oh! What about sundials?”

DAD: “Yeah. There were sundials back then. But they couldn’t tell the time that well. They couldn’t tell you it was 10:27. All a sundial could ever do was roughly tell you what the time was. You know, by casting a shadow. And only then of course if the sun was out.”

ISABELLA: “Oh, yeah! Well then, maybe he was doing some maths.”

DAD: “Maths?”

ISABELLA: “Yeah. Like . . . I don’t know. Ten point twenty-seven or something. Or maybe he was trying to do ten over twenty-seven.”

DAD: “What! Alright. And then what?”

ISABELLA: “What do you mean?”

DAD: “Then what happened?”

ISABELLA: “How should I know? He just stopped for some reason.”

DAD: “Stopped?”

ISABELLA: “Yeah. Maybe he got sick of doing maths just as the person was trying to write down his stuff. It’s possible.”

Fast numbers

With the use of a stopwatch, one of Amelie’s teachers wanted me to test Amelie reading some vowels. We didn’t get very far before Amelie thought she smelt a rat.

AMELIE, sneaking a look at my stopwatch as she was reading: “Are those little numbers doing the counting too?”

DAD: “Hmm-hmm. They’re called tenths of a second and one-hundredths of a second.”

AMELIE: “Oh, any wonder, Dad! Any wonder I’m not getting very faster (sic). Your watch has really fast numbers on it.”

Questions for God

DAD: “Well, Issy, yet again you have nits.”

ISABELLA: “I know. Why did God want to make them?”

DAD: “Well—”

ISABELLA: “I don’t know how people if they’re religious can handle that? Because I’d just be so annoyed at God for making them.”

DAD: “Hmm.”

ISABELLA: “And he makes all sorts of things that don’t need to be in this world. Or things that eat us! It’s sort of freaky.”

DAD: “So you don’t think that, um, a god that loved us would do that? Is that what you’re trying to say?”

ISABELLA: “Well, if I made a world, I wouldn’t do that if I wanted to love the people that lived on it.”

DAD: “Hmm. Well, what would you do? How would you design it?”

ISABELLA: “I’d make just good things. Things that make people happy. Instead of scary things like robbers – all that stuff. God’s magic. He should be able to look into the future. So, he’d be able to look into the future to see if there’s going to be a robber.”

DAD: “Well, if God can make it really nice for us, shouldn’t he just make it really nice for us from the start?”

ISABELLA: “Then he’d need to make nice people to go on that land.”

DAD: “That’s right.”

ISABELLA: “Or otherwise he’d have to make bad things to make them sad and go away.”

DAD: “Well, what do you think God’s trying to do then?”

ISABELLA, a little overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to work out God’s mind: “I don’t know. He’s . . . made a lot of animals extinct. If he is real. This is if he is real.”

DAD: “Well, that’s right. If he is real. So you’re not sure, are you?”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, I’m not really sure because there’s no proof of either side.”

DAD: “Hmm. But if you were God, how would you make the world?”

ISABELLA: “Um, I’d make positive things. Nice teachers, I’d make nice people, nice bus drivers, nice, like, all sorts of drama teachers and dancing teachers – all of them would be nice.”

DAD: “Hmm.”

ISABELLA: “And, sometimes people would

have sadness. But then they'd learn. They wouldn't do that [what caused them to be sad, presumably] next time."

DAD: "So, you'd allow a little bit of sadness, some hurt, would you?"

ISABELLA: "Yes."

DAD: "To learn lessons?"

ISABELLA: "Well, it's just better for the person to know that it's not always going to be perfect."

DAD: "But if you could be God – that means you can do anything you want – why don't you just make the person so that they already understand all the lessons in the first place and not go through the process? Because if you're God you can make them already—"

ISABELLA: "Well—"

DAD: "Understand everything. You know what I mean?"

ISABELLA: "Well, how is everyone going to be happy?"

DAD: "Can't you just make everything right? Straight from the start. Get everything right."

ISABELLA: "Well, not everyone can be right all the time."

DAD: "But why not be happy all the time? You're God. That means you can do anything you want. You can make people happy all the time."

ISABELLA: "I just don't think it'd be right."

DAD: "Why?"

ISABELLA: "Because everyone'll always be cheerful and never, like, just sad so someone can help them and then . . . they can be friends!"

DAD: "Oh! So the point of people being sad is it can make other people help them?"

ISABELLA: "They'll get friendship."

DAD: "If people are happy all the time they won't need help so people won't ever experience how to . . . help somebody? And that's a good feeling to help people, isn't it?"

ISABELLA: "Yeah. Because it's giving to others."

DAD: "Yeah. Exactly."

ISABELLA: "I wouldn't make any, like, starving children. I'd make it so everyone has food, water, clothes, shelter, a name, and a family (a loving family, not a bad family)—"

DAD: "So you wouldn't make it too bad? You'd only make it a bit bad?"

ISABELLA: "What do you mean 'a bit bad'?"

DAD: "Well, you know, you don't want to have people starving – that's terrible – but would you make it so the people get a bit sad?"

ISABELLA: "Yeah but . . . only occasionally."

DAD: "But why are they sad? What's caused it?"

ISABELLA: "Well, maybe a death by someone."

DAD: "But that's pretty bad though. A death."

ISABELLA: "Oh, it's just so confusing."

DAD, consolingly: "Yeah."

ISABELLA: "Well, I wouldn't want to make someone dead myself but then if I didn't someone wouldn't be able to have a child because it'd get overcrowded so there has to be deaths in my world. Because, how am I going to fit everyone on? I'd have to make more planets."

DAD: “Yeah, but you don’t want to die, do you?”

ISABELLA: “No.”

DAD: “Well then why are you letting other people die for? You’re not a very fair god.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, but, how am I going to fit everyone on the world?”

DAD, commiserating: “I know. So maybe you need to die.”

ISABELLA: “Me die?”

DAD: “Yeah.”

ISABELLA: “Why?”

DAD: “Well, so that . . . well, look, you can’t expect others to die if you’re not prepared to die yourself.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, but, I’d just live until I was old enough to die.”

DAD: “So you would be prepared to die?”

ISABELLA: “Well, Dad, everyone dies, okay? End of story.”

DAD: “Well, not really. God doesn’t.”

ISABELLA: “Oh, this is getting so annoying!”

DAD: “I’m just saying.”

ISABELLA, sighing: “Oh . . .”

DAD, very quietly and out of Isabella’s hearing: “He still keeps going.”

ISABELLA, wearily and feeling beaten: “I’m so confused.”

DAD: “It is a confusing topic, God. It really is.”

ISABELLA: “Because you keep saying, ‘why can’t everyone be alive?’”

DAD: “Well, anyway. Would you rather there be a god, or not? You know how you don’t know?”

ISABELLA: “Oh, I don’t know.”

DAD, repeating himself: “If you had a choice, would you rather there be a god, or not?”

ISABELLA: “I don’t know. Because otherwise . . . well, I need to know if he’s real first. Because, if he is real, then I’d want him because he made me. But, if he wasn’t real then there’s no point in having him.”

DAD: “Alright.”

ISABELLA: “So, I don’t really know.”

DAD: “Oh. Okay. Anyway, thinking about the Christian god for a second. Did you know that he said, as part of his Ten Commandments [it might have been the fourth commandment, I don’t know], you’ve got to have a day off each week? And he made it Sunday?”

ISABELLA: “Huh?”

DAD: “Yeah, I know. Because he said you need a day of rest. Because he did so much work in six days that he needed a rest. So, the Christian god gets tired. Which is interesting.”

ISABELLA: “Hmm. All he has to do is go, ‘Okay, lights, camera, action.’”

DAD: “So, you reckon he can just—”

ISABELLA: “Well, I don’t think he could have done it all by himself, could he?”

DAD: “Apparently he did everything by himself.”

ISABELLA: “In the Bible, doesn’t it say that he said, ‘Let there be light’, or something like that? And then it happened [pitchoo]. Well, then, that’s not that much work saying that, is it?”

DAD: “No, that sounds pretty easy to me. I don’t think that’d tire me out. Just saying,

'Let it all happen.' And then it does."

ISABELLA: "Yeah. And then you say, 'A few people over there and a few over here. And a few animals, and a few pigs, and a few horses. How did he get to say stuff? How did he get to go, 'Hi, my name's God!'"

DAD: "I don't know."

ISABELLA: "The people that he made were like fish [Isabella doesn't appreciate that a literal reading of the Bible wouldn't approve of evolution so we wouldn't share a common ancestor with fish] and they couldn't talk. And then the next thing couldn't talk, and then the next thing couldn't talk; why couldn't he make animals talk? Because that would be really handy."

DAD: "Would it?"

ISABELLA: "Yeah. Because then I could talk to Angus [her pet dog]. And then the pigs and cows could say, 'I don't think this is right. And I shouldn't be kept. And I shouldn't be killed.' And then everything would be good. Like in *Animal Farm*. Remember when the pigs dressed up in those human clothes and took over the farm?"

DAD: "Yeah."

ISABELLA: "Yeah, that'd be pretty cool."

DAD: "Well, it doesn't look like God gave any of the animals a voice. I mean, you got a voice."

ISABELLA: "Oh yeah! Why did he want them to be killed? Maybe he doesn't want that. How do the Christians know? They shouldn't eat meat because what if God doesn't want that? It's His animals that he made!"

Nobody reads them

ISABELLA, as the credits began to roll slowly at the end of a film she was watching with Holly: "Dad, why do they do the 'written bys' for?"

DAD: "'The written bys?'"

ISABELLA: "Hmm. Nobody reads them. Everyone just goes to bed."

It's what you do at sixty

AMELIE, referring to the author, Bill Bryson, whom I was reading at the time: "Is he on the way to breaking his leg and fracturing his arm? Because sixty is old so he should be."

Amelie's grandfather recently broke some ribs and a hip so she thinks that's just what people do when they get old.

Lighting a match for the first time

ISABELLA, nervously reading off a box of matches, before she was about to light a match for the first time: "It says, 'WARNING: KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN'. That's not you off to a good start, is it, Dad?"

After lighting the match . . .

ISABELLA, elatedly: "That was so easy! (*Referring to the rest of the matches in the box*) Would all the matches in the box be as easy as that?"

If you had to get run over

AMELIE, on the way to school this morning as a blue plume of fumes from a motor bike almost engulfed us on our pushbikes: "Dad, I'd rather get run over by a motor bike more than a car."

DAD: "What about not getting run over at all? Wouldn't you rather that the most?"

AMELIE: "No! If you *had* to get run over."

LAST WORD

The most boring question in the world

ISABELLA: "Sometimes I hate older people. Because they ask you really boring questions like, 'Who did you play with at school?' It's the most boring question in the world."