

# Leadership

## Money and marriage metaphors for making ministry decisions of value

Reach into your pocket and take out a coin. Flip it over between your fingers, and feel the weight, the mineral quality and substance. Check the imprinted images on either side.

### Heads and Tails.

What is it **worth**, what is its **value**, and how do you know?

On one side is the image of our sovereign. Looking young and lovely, though proper, dignified and respectable, Elizabeth II by her graven image gives authorisation and value to a little disc of alloy. There she is, everywhere, even in the far flung reaches of the once-were colonies; ever young, ever royal, ever the same.

Flipping to the tail side you'll be looking at a platypus, or an echidna, flock of Roos or an indigenous elder. This side of the coin carries something to wonder at, something particular, and with the image, a clear number, declaring the specific denomination of numerical value is given. The head of the coin declares its value. The tail of the coin declares its value.



### How do you know that you are loved and valued?

What signifies this to you?

We have cultural symbols of value and appreciation - flowers and chocolates, physical affection, notes of thanks perhaps.

And we also have frameworks for deciphering our messages individualistically. The 5 love languages series (Chapman) has become enormously popular. And other broad mythologies of 'what women want' in distinction from the male mind map feed into our repertoire of value communication strategies.

These generalisations strike a chord for many of us, and are perplexing for many more. We recognise the patterning they describe, but it can seem for some of us that someone has switched the labels on the boxes. I'm not wanting to debate simplistic categories of masculine and feminine traits in western culture, grotesque and alienating as I find them, but to explore the two sided coin of value, and the conflicting ways in which we seek to express and actualize this in relation to children and families in our communities of faith.

There are very few churches (though there are a few) who are willing to confess to not valuing children at all. Most churches affirm at least verbally that they value their children.

But the **question is how**.

Many churches express their value of their children by developing specialised programs, appointing specialised staff, and creating child-designated spaces.

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### *Date Me/Marry Me*

This is, I think, a little bit like the difference between dating and marriage. (Though I have to admit that haven't been on a date in over 25 years so I'm open to correction here.)

I went on a date once, when I was about 18. And, as I recall, it was kind of nice to be treated specially. But it was clear that it would be limiting and strange and dysfunctional to live like that all the time.

The idea of **dating** is that you **create a special, hemmed in, exclusive environment**.

**Marriage**, on the other side of the coin so to speak, is not about special and exclusive time together, but **sharing all of life**, with no "beg your pardons". Honestly I have to declare my personal bias here. I like marriage. I like loyalty and faithfulness. I like doing life together.

But we live in a dating culture. Many contemporary narratives tell us that marriage is boring, and advise those of us who are married that we need to 'date' our partner, in order for our marriages to survive. That sharing life together isn't enough.

I probably haven't lived long enough to make a call on this. So I'm prepared to give it a 'maybe.' But one thing I do know. The loyalty and faithfulness thing - it has got to stay. If dating demonstrates or adds or testifies to value in a marriage, it must be in addition to the broad sharing of life together. Our culture loves and is addicted to the 'special', the 'dramatic', the 'romantic', the 'event'. But life is truly found in the everyday moments of solidarity and integrity –and from there I find much to celebrate.



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### *Children and communities of faith*

And so to our children and our communities of faith.

How shall we demonstrate the value of our children amongst us?  
And how shall we structure this value?

Let's think about our gatherings. How are children valued? Through the **provision of special kid things**?  
Or through **shared life in the community** of faith.

I think that it's fairly clear that **children will need both**.

Both sides of the coin express it's value. The platypus swimming under that clear 20 tells us the exchange value of the coin, but without the regent head on the other side the metal has no currency, **no authorisation**, in fact no authenticity.

Special programs for our children including kids talks and Sunday clubs must be backed by the generic over-arching authorization of inclusion and affirmation in the whole community. The specialized program acts like the numerical denomination on the coin: we can see in staff allocated hours and budget line dollars exactly the percentage value of children. In fact we can probably index it and determine the exact value of an individual child in our community. Does this strike you as slightly appalling, if not mitigated by the inestimable value of participation in whole community?

This is a big ask for us as twenty-first century Christians, because our culture is riddled with niche-ing, targeting, tailoring, segmentation. Nothing in western materialism and individualism encourages us that we could adequately share our things, our experience our life.

But the gospel of Jesus does.

It says we can sell everything and follow him together and not lack for what is lifegiving and truly good.

Sadly, we have lost or sold off our cultural vocabulary for being together in a big lumpy odd inclusive celebration of faithfulness to grace. Grace in a community calls us to lay aside our particular valuations. It calls us to **give up our claims to need**, need of anything beyond the body and blood of Christ itself, which is broken and shared among us, all of us together.

We **struggle most to be together when we think we have something to lose**. Most often this is expressed to me as the fear of adults that they will **lose their intellectual superiority** and depth, and forfeit their accumulation of spiritual maturity.



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I think to this Jesus would speak a parable of a wealthy man who tears down his barns to build biggest barns.

Or perhaps offer the wisdom that must be willing to lose our lives in order to save them.

The value of being together, all together, I admit will **not be as compelling for the 'haves'** as for the **'have-nots'**.

Paul radically said he would be **willing to lose his salvation**, in order for **others to gain theirs**.

I wonder if those who are adults, with a few miles on the discipleship meter are willing to risk 'losing' their spiritual maturity, in order that younger people, yet to choose Jesus, might be valued, incorporated, addressed, nurtured and challenged.

Or maybe I have it all wrong. Maybe the order is right. And that adults ought to be given preference in value in the church – for they are the **fragile**, the ones whose faith is weak and trembling, and it is to children that the kingdom already belongs.

Perhaps.

But if it is so, that grown ups are in greater need, then I think we must value them. We must value grown ups, with both sides of the coin, with 'dates' and with 'marriages'. Grown ups must be valued by being given their 'special time'...but also by be incorporated into the whole – with children, to whom the kingdom belongs.

Fortunately, most children I know, are great sharers.



Photo by Stephen Eastop