

Editorial: Breadcrumbs in the bellybutton and other stunts

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I'll be glad when my grandson, Ezra, learns to speak English.

Actually, Ezra already speaks English—partway. He doesn't have any trouble communicating some of his greatest desires. Like when he wants to go outside, or blow bubbles, or play with his trains, or race, or watch Thomas the Tank Engine and Mickey Mouse on my iPad, or find my dog.



Editor Marv KnoxBut more complex speech simply evades his 2?-year-old grasp. He hasn't graduated to abstract thinking. And if I question, "Why?" I might as well be speaking Swahili.

So, understanding Ezra's rationale sometimes is as complex as Winston Churchill found Russian thought, which he described as "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." I watch him closely, wondering exactly what's going on inside that little head. And I'm befuddled.

This came to mind the other day, when his mama and my daughter, Lindsay, posted this note on Facebook: "I guess Ezra is afraid I may quit feeding him since he's stashing breadcrumbs in his belly button and then pulling them out to eat them."

I agreed with his grandmama and my wife, Joanna, who posted in reply,

“That is quite funny and disgusting at the same time.” (My friend and colleague Ken Camp, the father of three sons, countered that if Joanna and I had raised boys instead of girls, we would be unfazed by bread in bellybuttons.)

We could be edified

If Ezra could articulate his thoughts, we could be edified. We could understand why he decided to start sticking breadcrumbs in his belly button and—even more fascinating-yet-loathsome—why he would eat them.

As it is, we’re left to speculate on the possibilities:

- His mama is right. He fears each meal may be his last, so he’s storing up.
- He’s a curious little boy. While eating a peanut butter sandwich, he mused: “Hey, my belly button is like a little sack. How many breadcrumbs will it hold? How long will it hold them? What will they taste like after they’ve been in my belly button for a while? Will my mom notice I stored breadcrumbs in my belly button and ate them for a snack?”
- He’s a budding comedian. At the tender age of 2?, he already knows two principles of slapstick: Although sight gags are the lowest form of humor, they always get a laugh. And you can bet the farm that gross jokes get an even-bigger laugh.
- He’s a magical prodigy. Someday, Ezra will pull rabbits out of hats, silver dollars out of children’s ears and bouquets of flowers out of thin air. But for starters, he’s perfecting the ol’ breadcrumbs-out-of-the-belly-button routine.

Unfortunately, we’ll never know exactly why Ezra decided to stuff

breadcrumbs in his belly button and eat them later. By the time he's old enough to explain himself, he will have progressed to more frantic antics. Breadcrumbs will be long forgotten.

Other strange, inexplicable stunts

Even more unfortunately, Ezra is not unique. And I'm not talking about the global population of 2?-year-olds. Our planet is full of people who pull strange, inexplicable stunts. You see this every morning when you look at the newspaper, every coffee break when you glance at the Internet, every evening when you turn on the news. Somebody, somewhere has done something totally bizarre but is at a loss to explain why.

We've seen so many politicians and prominent business people who think with regions of their bodies far removed from their brains, they could populate a European country. They governed states and ran Fortune 500 countries and then threw away their families, careers and reputations for a frisky fling or a fast buck. Then, given the opportunity to explain, they turned tongue-tied and told the world they're sorry if we're offended.

But those illustrations are too easy. And too distant.

Time and time again, our churches have lost precious influence, not to mention disgraced the name of Jesus, because they acted in decidedly un-Christlike ways. Fact is, the misbehavior within the church pretty much mirrors the misbehavior outside. And the squabbles and fights and mistreatment and pain we inflict on each other leave unbelievers wondering why they'd ever want anything we've got to offer.

Left to explain ourselves, we point fingers and cast blame and can't begin to articulate what happened, much less why.

Closer to home

But, again, those illustrations are too easy. And too distant.

In my own life, I trip over the rug of sin and shame again and again. The same lack of discipline and selfishness and apathy and feeble faith for which I've tearfully repented countless times steals my joy and zaps my spiritual strength. And I can't explain why, but only quote the Apostle Paul: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15).