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## DAY 1: CALLED TO BE A CHILD

Mark 10:15-16

In the Bible, there are a few, almost incidental, interactions between Jesus and children. Apparently, children were among the people constantly crowding around Him. Common to each of these stories is a strong correction from Jesus to the adults trying to manage them. Presumably some of the chastened were parents. The children in each of these stories seem to be (as we may well remember our own childhoods) adventurous.

They were probably not hovering near Jesus to learn. It is unlikely these were little theological protégés. They were not there to be healed or because they needed something from Him (except for His blessing). At least we have no reason to believe that, because no such reason is given. They were not there to lure Him into a religious trap. It takes a while for human beings to become Pharisees. So what was their motivation to be around Him? What was it about Jesus that intimidated His rivals, exposed His friends, but attracted children?

Likely, they wanted what all kids want: to be close to those who love them.

So, it is that childhood is not a missionless season of our lives. Instead, it is a foundational time when we are called to be exactly what it is easiest to be, a child. Children already belong to the kingdom, representing it, even bearing witness to it in some unconscious way.

When Jesus says, let the children come, He might also be saying, let them explore the world as a place of adventure and not a place of restriction. In turn, when He says, you must become like one of these little ones to enter the kingdom, He is saying, among other things, that what they are is enough. It may be the only time in our lives that what we are is all we need to be.

The writers of the New Testament will go on to understand childhood as an essential and foundational theological construct. We are all meant to know ourselves, perpetually as children of God. For that is what we are. Conversely, not as adults of God. It is this pure state before our transition into adulthood that we return to in our foundational relationship with God. No matter how old we are, He remains our Father and we remain His child.

## DAY 2: CALLED TO BE A STUDENT

Luke 2:46-50

As curious as we might be about the way Jesus would have been as a child (all the years before that), it seems, as far as the canon of Scripture is concerned, unimportant. This silence is interrupted by one singular moment, coming at what I would consider the threshold age between childhood and adolescence.

It is Passover, and as was their family's custom, Jesus' parents made the annual pilgrimage to the temple in the heart of Jerusalem. Being from Galilee and from a very poor town, this would have been a remarkable moment in the life of the family and especially in the life of the adolescent Jesus. He does not only take in the sights, smells, and pageantry of this bustling place, He somehow locates and insinuates Himself into the theological conversation happening there. We find Jesus seated among the teachers and truth seekers, not just listening but contributing. This is especially significant because this young Jewish acolyte would not yet have been considered a man. Jesus had not yet reached His bar mitzvah (age 13), and He was not just sitting among the men, but amazing them with insights of His own.

Possibly conveyed to the disciples by Jesus' mother, this story is told from the vantage point of the family who are not so much amazed by Jesus as they are annoyed. Somehow separated from the entourage as they begin the journey home to Galilee, the family eventually discovers Jesus is not with them. Exasperated, they return to find Him regaling an audience with His teachings about God.

Still, the story seems less about a young savant and more about a typical teenager finding himself in trouble with his parents. "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us like this?" (Luke 2:47-48). A response that now is viewed as a Christological revelation—"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)—might well have been received by His parents as what my grandmother called "sass."

Jesus enters his adolescence asking questions, testing His ideas, and even deviating from the expectations of others. From the outside that can look like rebellion, but it is really the externalized acts of someone who is learning. If Day 1 and childhood offer us the non-anxious possibility that God is only asking us to be what we already are (children), so too the adolescent should not rush the deep work of being a student. What is the calling, and in turn, the formed identity for the adolescent? In the broadest possible terms, it is to be an apprentice to their own life.

A big part of being a student is choosing who your teachers will be. If God is calling the adolescent to listen, try, discover, test, and learn, there is no greater partner in that journey than Jesus. The second person of the Trinity offers us this profound metaphor for the relationship between God and His people; student and teacher. Jesus is the perfect teacher for the developing adolescent, giving them identity, agency, and mystery. If the general call for the adolescent is to learn, then the specific call is to learn from Jesus.

## DAY 3: CALLED TO WORK

### Acts 11:25

Like many Christians, I am fascinated by the life of the apostle Paul (also called Saul), the first apostle who was not a part of the original twelve. His story is a proxy for all of us who would come to follow Jesus (and be sent out by Him) after His resurrection. Paul is the first of our kind, called and arrested by the voice of Jesus in a blinding light on a road, while heading somewhere else.

As much material as we have about his life, there are large portions that remain something of a mystery. Between his Road-to-Damascus conversion, his partnership with Barnabas, and eventually their ordination into missionary service in Acts 13, there are few clues as to his whereabouts and developmental journey. Somewhere between his surrender to Jesus (which would change him) and his sending into mission (which would change the world), there seems to be a time of growth and development that mirrors our own.

In the book of Galatians, Paul explains that it was fourteen years after his dramatic conversion that he went to Jerusalem. And there, his story, as told in the book of Acts, begins in earnest. Barnabas finds him there, and he brings him to a city called Antioch, presumably to help him finally accept his unique calling to the Gentiles. It is in Antioch where the elders, responding to the Holy Spirit, lay their hands on Paul and Barnabas and send them on what would be the first Gentile mission. It is not an overstatement to say that this ordination would change the world.

Still, what happens to Paul in those fourteen years between his conversion and the fulfillment of this world-altering calling? Something happened in that time which prepared Paul not only for some incredibly brave missionary work, but also for the theological revelation and spiritual maturity he would need to be worthy of such an assignment. Perhaps we all need a period of being unremarkable before we are ready to do something worthy of remark.

This is fundamental to life in Day 3. In our late 20s and early 30s, we can suffer a strange cocktail of both delusions of grandeur and debilitating insecurity. We can feel we are meant to be making our mark on the world, while also feeling an increasingly desperate sense that we are not doing that at all. Both presumptions are usually wrong.

In this season of Paul's life, he was being disciplined by people (namely Peter and Barnabas) who had known Jesus longer than he had. He was developing a theology of salvation by grace through faith. He was reconsidering the place of the law in the lives of the Gentile world. He was even doing mission, preaching the gospel to the Gentiles around him. But he was generally serving God in ways that would not be remembered. This perhaps is the most important aspect of this part of our developmental journey: to serve for a while in relative obscurity.

Perhaps we all need a period of being unremarkable before we are ready to do something worthy of remark.

The call of God on those of us in Day 3 is to work and serve as part of a team. In doing so, we learn the invaluable lessons of character, which are unlearnable without submission. Further, our willingness to do anything that is needed results in a flurry of skill acquisition unmatched in any other time in our lives. It is on this day, that the healthy soul discovers that Jesus was right—when we lay down our lives, we find them.

# DAY 4: CALLED TO MAKE

## Genesis 1:27

The first and greatest story of creation is the story of God. Our Father was the first maker. The cosmos itself begins with sound and light. It has always been a wonder to me that secular scientists' best theory for the beginning of the world is called the "big bang," another way of saying a single photoacoustic event from which the universe expands. And in those first lines of our ancient text, we are told that God said, "Let there be light." Into the nothing He SPEAKS, and LIGHT explodes the cosmos into existence. Sound and light. Maybe He has never stopped doing that. We have the world because He spoke and His word illuminates everything else. Each transition is like that for us—a visitation of that ancient memory to hear Him say a word to us, to shine a light on one thing from a chaotic sea of possibilities.

Yet, that was just the beginning of His creative work. The Maker was making a world for us, each layer being laid for the final creation that would most closely resemble Him. He was not just making a world, He was making a family. He makes a world so that a family can emerge and live in it. This has both beautiful and breathtaking implications for us.

Every life is an act of creation. For that reason, every life is a work of art. And this is never more apparent than in Day 4. In this season of life, the primary work is creating. Building on the foundation of Day 3, a person now has enough information about themselves, their skills, motivations, and gifts to be able to ask and answer the deepest questions of calling: What is something that only I am able to create and offer to the world? What unique thing can I do, start, or plant?

If forced to choose between a job that allows you to create something or a job that pays you better, the choice is clear. The pay may give you better things but not better relationships. And as we will all eventually discover (usually at the end of our lives) relationships are the only real wealth we ever acquire. I am not saying that money is unimportant, only that it is a weak substitute for the community that creation can create. The act of starting something, for instance, will also mean a new series of deeply meaningful friendships with people who rally around the thing you are called to create. The call to make something is also an initiation into a community because you are probably not the only person God is calling.

Answering the question about what you will make with your life is an invitation into a family of people who are also called to make the same thing with their lives. And of course, our art is also mission so it is also meant to relieve and redeem people in need. The identity of Day 4, then, is one of artist, maker. But, the art we make is not only for us, it is meant to somehow recall the first archetype of creation. To hear the word of God call us into the work of co-creation, to make something that was not there before and to see a new community form around it.

## DAY 5: CALLED TO BE A MENTOR

### 1 Corinthians 4:14-16

In his stern but vulnerable letter to the Corinthian church, Paul offers a series of challenges responding to immature decisions he has heard they have been making. Yet in it, the heart of a true mentor is unveiled. In this particularly vivid line, he defines his own role and responsibility to them, “I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:14–16).

We need spiritual mothers and fathers, which means we all need to also become one.

The wise painter, who has pioneered a new style of painting, will not spend their Day 5 selling their paintings; they will spend it teaching that style to a new generation of young painters. In turn, the world will not just have a few more paintings with that strange new style; it will be filled with painters filling the world with paintings inspired by it. This is the economy of scale and is at the heart of the impact that will most move us in Day 5.

One of the perils of a culture that glorifies perpetual youth is that we resist gifts of growing older. To give away the spoils of Day 4 should be an occasion for celebration. To take the role of mentor is a psychosocial, even a spiritual, promotion. But because of our fetish for youth, we can resist this new identity. We might be tempted to hold on too long to what we worked so hard to gain in Day 4. Our money, position, title, influence, networks, even the intellectual property of experiential learning, can become stagnant in Day 5 if we refuse to give them away. We hang on too long to our rainmaker identities because we have wrongly believed that those years of creative productivity are simply better.

We still have 10,000 guardians who might have an opinion on our behavior, but we do not have enough spiritual parents. This is the role of the mentor, and it is best embodied on Day 5. If we have been blessed to have men and women in our lives who have filled this role, then we will know just how important it is. If, on the other hand, we have looked in vain for such a person, only now to find ourselves on the precipice of fifty, it is time to lay that down and be for others what we did not have ourselves. In Day 5, we find that who we are called to be is in short supply and just what a world of spiritual orphans most needs.

## DAY 6: CALLED TO BE A MYSTIC

### 1 John 4:7-12

The best we can tell, the longest living disciple was John, and he may have lived into his 90s. This would have been miraculously old for the first century. In fact, his advanced years may have contributed to the widespread rumor at the time that Jesus claimed He would not die. Still, we should all be grateful for John's long life and the late-blooming writing contributions he made. In spite of being exiled to the island of Patmos under the tyrannical reign of Nero, John survived to write a Gospel, his extraordinary Revela-

tion, and likely three epistles.

Even a cursory survey of John's gospel and his epistles reveals one persistent, overarching theme: love. And despite its confounding imagery, the book of Revelation offers us the most mystical and forward-looking piece of Scripture in all the Bible. It could be argued that these two themes, or vantage points, would have been underdeveloped in the New Testament without him. These two areas of fascination—mysticism and love—are endemic to Day 6.

In his final years, John seemed to grow more and more fixated and even obsessed with the love of God . . . perhaps, because he had become more aware of that love finding a home in his own heart. And similarly, he seemed to find new heights of intimacy and understanding about the world to come, revelation that was the direct result of deep and luxurious prayer. In the last days of his life, he found himself fascinated by both mystery and love. All of us, as we enter Day 6, can hope for the same fascination as our calling and development takes one final turn toward a panoramic perspective, primarily lived out in a few important relationships.

The work of the final day, then, like day six of creation, is about people. On day six, God makes human beings in His image. And so, on Day 6 of our creative lives, we look for a small group of people to impart the full blessing and gift of our leadership legacy. This last Day is about investing in a few truly worthy people who can be the repository of our best learning and our highest care and support. But, like day six of creation, it is also about union, or in our case, re-union. About the impending promise of God walking again with us in the cool of the day and our gaze turning, for the first time, away from this world and on to the next.

Of course we are still creating, still mentoring, and for that matter still learning and serving, up until our last breath. Those identities are never lost to us. But the mystic embraces the final day of life for what it is, an impending reunion with God.

The conviction of the centrality of love is fed by the revelations of a life, long lived, and an eternity waiting for us. In the end, this is also the image of God we pass on to our prodigy. We, having been recreated into the image of God, who is love, are then leaving ourselves as an impression on those that are closest to us. We leave a legacy as mystics who drink deeply from the cup of love, perhaps because we know we will soon see His face.

## DAY 7: CALLED TO REST

### Mark 9:2

One of the more remarkable, yet often overlooked characteristics of Jesus' life and ministry was His apparent introversion, perhaps even shyness. Even after He burst onto the scene doing miracles and gathering massive crowds throughout Galilee, He was often trying to evade and escape the throng of the crowd. The fullness of His deity was not something He wanted to use as a lever for belief or allegiance. As Paul would explain, He took "the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). And those who would believe in Him would



have to believe in Him in that form. There is, however, one remarkable exception. An episode that has come to be known simply as the transfiguration stands alone as a moment that reveals Jesus as something entirely other than human. And the reason we know about it is because three of His friends were allowed to witness it.

I find it strangely important that this revelation comes to them just after Jesus predicts His death: One crushing revelation followed by an exalting one. And this revelation comes to them, in the words of Mark, “after six days” (Mark 9:2). Of course, the passing of six days is important, not just to Mark but to us. It is a full week that has passed, and it is at the end of that length of time, the same length of time with which the Father made the world, that Jesus is revealed to them as something other than a suffering servant.

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them” (Mark 9:2).

And so it is that after the Six Days of our lives, Jesus will take us to the place of full and final transfiguration. The secret of His identity will be fully and finally revealed, the role of faith no longer necessary, as the undeniable reality of His glorious person will be ours to behold. Whatever there is to say about life after death, this much is promised. We will behold Him. And we will know fully, even as we are fully known.

For those who love Him, whose whole life (whether we were always aware of it or not) was a yearning to be with Him, this represents the greatest possible reward. Every time we felt sad, alone, broken, torn, ashamed, or afraid, we were really waiting for this moment—to behold someone so utterly beautiful, so totally whole, that our every tear would be wiped away. Once and for all. This, then, is the first connotation of the 7th Day. It is a reward for a life lived under the banner of His love and dependent on His grace. Just as the transfiguration was a kind of reward to Peter, James, and John for staying with Him in spite of an impending crucifixion, so too we will be rewarded for holding fast until the end.

So it is that the whole of our lives will have been a preparation for this one great task—to rest and reign alongside Him. To have been made worthy by His sacrifice and to see that work finally completed. It is a sumptuous hope that we hold on to, and no matter your age as you read this, no matter your stage of life or development, if you will make Him Lord, this is your wondrous future.