

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

**Subject:** Christian living

**Central theme:** Joining Jesus -In your family

**Objective:** Everyone can join Jesus in what he is doing with their families with a few simple reactions to that work.

**Rational:**

1<sup>st</sup> reaction- Recognize it and go with it.

2<sup>nd</sup> reaction- Talk about it, inside and out.

3<sup>rd</sup> reaction- Act on it.

**Resources:** Bible Passages: Psalm 51? Isaiah 43: 1-4 & 10-13, John 3:9-21, Quote from *Me I Want to Be* page 29 & 157

**Evaluation:**

**Readings:** Portion of Psalm 51, Isaiah 43: 1-4 & 10-13, John 3:9-21

**Recognize it and go with it!**

I would say one of the biggest issues we have when it comes to joining Jesus' work in our families isn't an unwillingness to join Him. It's an inability to discern or see what He is doing. We tend to only see our faults and the faults of those around us. We have a hard time seeing ourselves a God sees us. So often we think there is no way God can use me or my family because of (fill in the blank). Folks as I said last week... "we all have the calling. Everyone that God has used, in all of history, was an ordinary person. Their relationship with God and the activity of God is what made them extraordinary. Anyone who will take the time and commitment to enter into an intimate relationship with God can see God do extraordinary things through his or her life." How many of you know who King David is in the Bible? How is he remembered? Most people remember him as the giant slayer, the tender shepherd boy or even the ancestor of Jesus. When Luke wrote the Book of Acts this is how he remembers David, "David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam 13:14). But do you really know just how messed up David and His family were? Where to start, right? Did you know David had eight wives that we know of? There may have been more...and from these wives, David had 19 sons. Let the destructive intrigue and blood-letting

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begin. Now some people say no big deal that was just how things were back then. Really? What did God say in Genesis 1&2? “And God said that a man (singular) shall leave his father and mother (singular) and cling to his wife (singular) and the TWO (not three or more) of the them shall become one (Gen 2:24). God created for Adam, only Eve, and not also Jane and Sue and Mary and Ellen and Samantha etc. David, already with many wives and competing sons, deepens the trouble when he has Uriah the Hittite killed, and takes his wife Bathsheba. The remarkably wicked act of murder rooted in lust and fear, shows a deep flaw in King David for which he is repentant, writing Psalm 51. But Bathsheba’s inclusion into the royal family only adds to the intrigue in the family, and the royal court. For she later advances the cause of her son, Solomon, against David’s older sons. Even prior to that pot boiling over, tragedy had struck elsewhere in David’s family, among his sons. His eldest son and likely heir, Amnon grew desirous of, and eventually “has his way with” his half-sister Tamar. According to Scripture, “And when king David heard of these things, he was exceedingly grieved: but he would not afflict the spirit of his son Amnon, for he loved him, because he was his firstborn” (2 Sam 13:21). This was a mistaken understanding of love. For the love of a Father for his son must include discipline, and insistence on what is right. Amnon had seriously sinned and owed restitution. David remained quiet when he should have spoken and acted. Due to David’s inaction, one of David’s other sons (and full brother of Tamar), Absalom, grew furious at what was done to his sister. So he plotted, and eventually killed Amnon, and then fled to the Land of Geshur. David now had lost two sons and had a daughter who had her honor taken from her.

Next time you don’t think God can use you or your family, remember David and his family tree. When you get over your disbelief that God has chosen you and your family, go with it. If you were to have talked to most of my teachers, pastors and friends, heck even my parents when I was in my teens and 20’s, they would have never seen me as a pastor myself. (ok, for the record, one of my pastors, Pastor Terry, the one I got along with the least and disrespected the most, upon hearing I

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was going into ministry said he saw it in me when I was 17 or 18. If you look at the intentional time he spent with me you can see he was on to something.) But other than him the people in my life may have seen great things for me but it was mostly a great chef or entrepreneur! It wasn't that I was far from God. It was that they all knew I was a Christian. I was just one of those Christians that Kyle Idleman describes in his book *Not a Fan*. I was a fan of Jesus, not a follower at that time in my life. When the time came and I finally conceded God wanted more from me in this life than just filling peoples bellies with good food, He wanted me to fill them with the bread of life, Jesus. It was a long and at times painful transition. I gave up a near six figure salary as a top chef for get this, \$7k a year. This isn't to say how great I am. This is to point out how great my God is. Not only did I give up the security of money and fame, we also found out we were finally expecting a child after 6 years of waiting. So now I will make far less and have to stretch it even further. One of my closest friends at the time and still today said to me one day, "Dave, I know you don't know how you'll put gas in your car to get home or how you'll pay the mortgage this month. But I just need to tell you, you are filled with far more joy in your life than I have ever seen." God spoke to me by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church. He extended an invitation for me to work with Him that led to a crisis of belief that required faith and action. I needed to make major adjustments in my life to join God in what He was doing. His call on my life started when I was 15 or 16, but I didn't fully "buy in" until I was 30. I have also had the privilege to walk with over a dozen students while discerning a call to ministry. I can think of one that has been a pastor for about 15 years now. His dad was not very happy with me when I affirmed his decision to give up a baseball scholarship to an SEC school in favor of going to a little Bible school and play ball for them while preparing for ministry. That led him to get his Masters of Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. When I said Dad wasn't too happy with me, that was an understatement. He was an elder in my last church and didn't speak to me for a few years. Now though, he is so grateful for what God has done in his son's life and he couldn't be prouder. It wasn't that this

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dad was a bad person or not a “good Christian.” It was he couldn’t see what God was doing in his very own family. By the way, the young man’s sister has also been serving the Lord for about 20 years now as a top volunteer in her churches children’s ministry. So many of us parents want the world for our kids. But how often do we stop and thank God for giving us the privilege of raising them for the first part of their lives and offering them back to Him for His glory? No matter how scary that path looks to us.

**The second reaction we need to have is to talk about it, inside and out.**

That means talk about it inside the family and everywhere else, too. We need to be telling our friends, neighbors, relatives and especially church leaders what we think we see God doing. Remember, God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church. Our church, friends and family can help us discern what God is doing. But we have to make sure we are getting Godly counsel, not just wise counsel. When I gave up being a chef to go into ministry my extended family couldn’t believe it. Many were even mad. They thought I was throwing away my career. I wasn’t going to provide for my family. When they found out we were pregnant, they were even more insistent that I was making the wrong choice. But what they could not understand is that God was at work and I wasn’t just asking Him to bless what I wanted to do. I was accepting the call to join Him in what he was already doing. I’d like to share another part of the book *The Me I Want to Be* by John Ortberg, I think it lends itself well to this discussion. “The one pair of eyes into which you can never gaze is your own. There are parts of yourself you will never see without a mirror, camera, or outside help. So it is with your soul. In one sense, you know yourself better than anyone in the world. You alone have access to your inner thoughts, feelings, and judgments. In another way, you know yourself worse than anyone else can know you, for we all rationalize, justify, minimize, forget, and embellish — and we do not even know when we are doing it. There is a me I cannot see. Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson

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have written a wonderfully disturbing book called *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)*, which charts the mental tricks we play to deceive ourselves. We all fall for the self-serving bias. We claim too much credit and too little blame. Most faculty members rate themselves as above average teachers, and virtually all high school students rate themselves as above average in social skills. Most people in hospitals due to car crashes they caused, rate themselves as above-average drivers. Even when people have the notion of self-serving bias explained to them, most people rate themselves as above average in their ability to handle the self-serving bias. We suffer from the fundamental attribution error. When I see bad behavior in you, I attribute it to your flawed character. When it happens in me, I attribute it to extraordinarily trying circumstances. When you yell at your kid, you have an anger problem. When I yell, it's my kids' fault for misbehaving. We are also guilty of confirmation bias. We pay attention to experts who agree with opinions we are already committed to, ignoring or discounting contrary evidence. Our memories are not simply faulty; they are faulty in favor of our ego. People remember voting in elections they didn't vote in, voting for winners they did not vote for, and giving money to charities that they never gave to. They remember their children walking and talking at ages earlier than they did. (I know these are findings of credible research, but I can't remember who the researcher was — I think it might have been me.) The book *Egonomics* tells of a survey in which 83 percent were confident in their ability to make good decisions, but only 27 percent were confident in the ability of the people they worked closely with to make good decisions. We are all viewing ourselves in the fun house mirror. People who know me well can always see these trends in me more easily than I see them in myself. This is why we are often stunned when someone else sees past our defenses into our souls. It is not that they are geniuses. It is just that I am sitting right in my blind spot. "Acknowledge Your Own Blind Spot" Apart from the flow of the Holy Spirit, we can't even see our sin. Here is a vivid picture of how this works: When we lived in Chicago, there was a season when we would often get heavy snow. (It started in August and ended in June.) To melt snow and ice, the street crews would cover the

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roads with rock salt, which ended up coating car windshields. At night, driving by headlights in the dark, you don't know the film is there. Then the sun comes up, and sunlight is 500,000 times more intense than moonlight. The intensity of the sunlight illumines all the salt on the windshield, and suddenly you can't see out of it. You can't go anywhere. You have only two choices: Get the windshield cleaned up, or drive only at night. Avoid the light."<sup>i</sup>

John 3:19 "God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light..." In 1997 I felt I was being called into ministry. But what I didn't know at that time was what phase of ministry? I was volunteering in a Willow Creek-style church at the time and had several avenues I could pursue. I knew Willow in Barrington had chefs on staff, so was I called to use my culinary skills for God? I volunteered in the youth ministry and enjoyed that a lot but I was nearly 30, so was it too late to be a youth pastor? I was also given my first church job as the tech & programing director of the church. I made a whole \$50 a month. But I could see that becoming a full-time job as well. It's kinda a lot of what Lloyd does here at MLC most people never see. They just experience it without realizing that it took lots of planning and expertise to pull off, to make it seem effortless. It was in having conversations with family and many pastors, not just the one from my church but others that we partnered with. I talked to others in the church to ask for prayer and how they perceived my calling. I talked to people in my culinary world to get a perspective from outside the church and I was surprised by the positive encouragement I was getting even from outside the church. But as I said already, there was a lot of opposition within the family. No, not the immediate family, my Mom & Dad were very supportive. So was my mother-in-law Diane. That's not to say she was not concerned how I would provide for Dana and what we thought was 1 child, that quickly became 2 boys in 10 months. LOL, but that's a whole other story. Some of you know Dana and I are going through this right now as parents. Our son Davey has spent the last two summers as a camp counselor at CLBC. He has

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volunteered in AWANA from the time he was a freshman in high school, served on the tech team and in the band. He was a Faith Guide with our Jr. Higher's last year and has been one of Brian's main high school youth leaders these last 3 months. He is probably going to be doing an internship next fall after his 3<sup>rd</sup> summer at camp. We have been praying for him for a long time, not knowing what God has in store for his life. We thought for the longest time he may be a Chef or even be involved in some type of C.S.I. It hasn't been easy for me. It's not the letting go part for me, it's the waiting on God's timing part. If you know me at all, I'm the type that says, "Lord I think I see an open door that you want me to go through. If it's not, please don't just close the door, nail the windows shut as well." LOL I was praying for him to have the internship this past fall, but it wasn't God's timing. I have had the privilege to lead our Thursday morning prayer group since Pastor Nygard's retirement. For the last 2 months this has been on our prayer list. I have discussed it at length with PK, Lloyd and Brian. Prayed about it with his grandparents and his friends. Most importantly, his mom and I have been talking with the Lord and each other about it for a long time. When you think you see God working and inviting you in, talk about it 'til you're blue in the face.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> and final reaction- Act on it!**

How many times do you find yourself having what they call a "conversation with the steering wheel"? This is all the points you think of after having an initial conversation with someone, usually someone with whom you disagree with on a subject. You find yourself thinking of all the things you should have said, or wish you had or, most regrettable, had not said. We have the same phenomenon when it comes to missing out on life's great opportunities. Many in the marketing industry have glommed to this idea and have used it in advertising to entice you to buy their product. It's called F.O.M.O. (fear of missing out). This isn't anything new we have seen it for years. How many times have you heard parents living vicariously through their kids? Mostly we think of it in sports or "the arts". But we

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can avoid F.O.M.O. and living through our kids or even grandkids when we simply act on what we see God doing in and around us.

As I shared last week God always used ordinary people like you and me, to accomplish His great works. We have mistakenly seen the people as great, not the works done through them by the power of God and only by His power. The one thing these people did that others did not was 'respond.' How many of you recall the story of Peter walking on water? I can't tell you how many times I heard this story growing up. The focus was always on Peter's failure to keep his eyes on Jesus. To me, we have done a great disservice not only to Peter, but to one another. We should be talking about the success of Peter! He was the only one who walked on water. The other 11 were the ones that failed, if you must identify failure. Isn't that what we do. We are wired in our society to look for failure, not celebrate success no matter how small. I heard a joke back in the early part of this century that makes this point very clear. It went something like this: "One day Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Billy Graham were out fishing and talking about faith. The boat broke down and they were stranded and needed to get back to shore. So, Bill and Billy simply jumped into the water and swam back to shore. However, George didn't. He took a minute and prayed, then he walked on the water back to dry land. The following day all the news headlines read 'George W. Bush can't swim.'" Isn't that so much like our media and so much like we have become. Now remember this was a joke, this event didn't happen, and it's not meant to praise or criticize any of our past presidents. But I have heard more than a few times from professional comedians that the best humor has an element of truth or reality to it.

Earlier in his Book *The Me I Want to Be*, John Ortberg shares this idea... "Psychologists have begun to speak of what is perhaps the largest mental health problem in our day. It is not depression or anxiety, at least not at clinical levels. It is languishing — a failure to thrive. Languishing is the condition of someone who may be able to function but has lost a sense of hope and meaning.

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Languishing is not the presence of mental illness; it is the absence of mental and emotional vitality. In ancient lists of deadly sins it was called *acedia* — weariness of soul and inability to delight in life. We speak of dead marriages and dead-end jobs, and to languish is to feel inner deadness. Languishing is the opposite of flourishing, and it was the fear of Henry David Thoreau that ‘when I came to die, [I would] discover that I had not lived.’ Often people have dreams for their life when they are young, but over time they simply give up. Writer and artist Gordan MacKenzie tells of visiting children in kindergarten and asking them, ‘Who is an artist?’ Every hand shoots up. This decreases to half the class by third grade. By the time the students are twelve years old, only a few hands go up. Over time many find that becoming the me they were meant to be is too hard or that it takes too long. When we give up on our growth and life’s purpose, we languish. But there is a person inside of you waiting to come alive.”<sup>ii</sup>

You have to Love Yourself.

I have known God loves me from a very young age. Matter of fact, it seems like I have always known it as my parents told me over and over again as a child and I heard this same message every Sunday growing up in the church. I tell you I have some real issues and I truly believe without my parents and the church impressing on me that God truly loved me, I don’t know that I would have lived past my early teens. I’m convinced that is one of the issues today with suicide and all this gender confusion in our young people. They do not know who they are and thus they do not know “Whose they are.” That’s a sermon for another day, back to my life for a moment. When I started accomplishing things as a chef, I lost sight of who I was in Christ and focused totally on who I was in man’s eyes. Before I accepted my identity as God’s beloved, I was never enough. (Remember I knew God loved me, but I didn’t totally understand what that truly meant.) Therefore, what I accomplished was never enough. And whatever good was there in front of me was impossible for me to take pleasure in, because I was trying so hard to be good that I could never just embrace the good.

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I was always bringing a false self to God, but God can't love a false self. So, I was unable to experience the fullness of God's love. I had no idea who I was. And in that confusion a light dawned, dim but sure.

I knew I needed to love myself again. The real me. I needed to present my real self, with all its flaws, all its mistakes, all its failures, and all its cowardice and cruelty, to God. I needed to feel my heavenly Father wrap his arms around the real me and say he loved and accepted me by his grace.

It can sound a little selfish and touchy-feely to say that self-love is the answer to our deepest needs. Isn't this just more positive psychology hoo-ha? Nope. We see the principle right there in the words of Jesus.

When Jesus was asked to pick the greatest commandment, he actually offered up two commandments from two Old Testament scriptures and then fused them together into a one-two punch of how to live a powerful life. He said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39).

When I quote or read that passage, I can't help but notice those last two words: "as yourself." In one statement Jesus links the ideas of loving God, loving your neighbor, and loving yourself. In my experience, this rings true. All three of those loves tend to rise and fall together. The more you love one, the more you love the others. People who never learn to love their true selves are often also limited in their love for God and others.

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What if the person who you need to be kindest to is yourself? What if the enemy you need to forgive or the prisoner you need to release is your true self? That is why God redeemed you.

How can you begin to love yourself better today?

Answer that and then you will be better equipped to act in faith when you see what God is doing and inviting you into today.

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<sup>i</sup> Ortberg, John. *The Me I Want to Be* (pp. 156-158). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> Ortberg, John. *The Me I Want to Be* (pp. 29-30). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.