

I. Advanced organizer - Hero's journey

- A. **Lego Movie**- summarize the story: Emmet the perfectly average Lego construction worker, finds himself identified as "the special" because he accidentally stumbles upon "the piece of resistance" and he gets swept up in this journey into a mythical world beyond what he has known to save Lego World from the schemes of the evil Lord Business. He has new friends who help him; he has a mentor. And with them by his side, this ordinary nobody is on his way to becoming a hero.
- B. Monomyth - story that emerges in every culture. Joseph Campbell, scholar of myth in 1940s, called it "The Hero's Journey" - Homer's Odyssey, Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, Tolkien's LOTR, Star Wars, Harry Potter: all essentially the same story.
 - 1. We resonate perhaps, and we tell it again and again, because we long for it to be our story. We long to be the unlikely hero who makes an impact on the greater world.
 - 2. Fundamental part of the myth is the the hero dies (or symbolically dies.) At the climax of the Lego Movie, Emmet has to jump into an abyss, which we assume means death in order to save his friends and possible his world. Harry Potter dies so that Voldemort can be fully killed. But as we'll see a little later, it's never the end of the story.

II. Transition: We're in the middle of a teaching series Called "**Find Your Calling**".

- A. In this series, we've been looking a massive research study undertaken by Dr. Bobby Clinton's, as he has delved into the question of how people might live into some sort of God-given purpose for their life; some sort of destiny. We've been considering together, if there's a God that cares about us, that wants us to live fulfilling lives of meaning and purpose, how could we partner with that God to do that well? **How could we find and fulfill our own callings?**
 - 1. 6 stages. Three of which we've covered. The goal is number 5, "convergence" where everything is working and we're in peak effectiveness in our calling - fully doing the thing we sense we were made to do and not so caught up in other stuff.
 - a) Sovereign Foundations (roughly childhood)
 - b) Inner-Life Growth (roughly 20s)
 - c) Ministry Maturing (growing in your area of service, your gifts, finding what you like and are good at) (30s)
 - 2. Today we're at half way point - roughly mid life. If we progress well through first few stages, at some point, we will find ourself entering stage 4: Life Maturing.

III. Life Maturing

- A. Goal is a mellowing and maturing of your character
 - 1. Sounds good, but the trick is it often comes through difficult processes
 - 2. starts with period of deep reflection forced upon you through one of following...
 - 3. Isolation, usually through circumstances that happen to you (e.g. *loss of a job, illness, move across the country*). Often we have to step back from the service/activities we were accustomed to: need to connect with God in deeper way
 - a) Could be the result of our own failure; can we hang in after we mess up?
- B. Conflict
 - 1. In last phase, conflict was about working with people; now it's about what conflict **says about you** - developing your character in a deeper way
 - 2. You become more aware of your own strengths and weaknesses. Where do you get hooked? Why?
- C. Crises (e.g. *divorce, death of a loved one, bankruptcy*)
 - 1. Learn new dependence on God. Experience God meeting you in the crisis.

2. More confident leader in the end. God is more understood as Source, Sustainer, and Focus of Life.

D. Dangers of Life Maturing:

1. To give up on the whole endeavor of pursuing a calling with Jesus.
2. To make really poor choices in the face of crisis and trauma (*affairs, poor financial decisions, alcohol, etc..*)

E. The phase Life Maturing is hard. If we're honest, it's also disarmingly honest and real.

IV. Doesn't just come from Bobby Clinton.

A. Jesus -

1. Mark 8:27-30: **27 Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"**

28 "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets."

29 Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Peter replied, "You are the Messiah."

30 But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

- a) Pause: Here Jesus has made it clear: you understand that I am the Messiah, the Anointed One (the chosen, the Special, ultimate return of the Jedi...I am it!) Here's what that means: (read on)

2. Mark 8:31 - 37: **31 Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man[c] must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. 32 As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.**

33 Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

34 Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 35 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. 36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? 37 Is anything worth more than your soul?"

- a) Jesus is saying, "you're right, I'm the Special. But me being the special, doesn't mean I get to go from Ministry Maturing to Convergence. **It means I need to suffer and die and be reborn. And guess what...you need to as well.**"
- b) It's easy to look at Jesus and say, he's just predicting his own death. We all know that's part of the story; he's giving us a heads up. But it's more than that. Jesus isn't dying so no-one else has to. Jesus is choosing to suffer and die, and expects his followers to do the same. (*So why are any of us here...?*)
- c) Proved to be true for Jesus' followers. **Peter** - total failure, denied Jesus three times on the night of his capture, even after Jesus warned him. It's a kind of death; a total failure of Peter's own capacity to live faithfully for Jesus. And then when Jesus rises, he embraces him, and he asks him three times, "Do you love me?" and Peter says yes, and Jesus says "Feed My sheep". Jesus is giving him a hand out of his pit with each of those "Do you love me?", "Feed My Sheep." One for each betrayal. He restores Peter

and then Peter goes on to be the catalytic leader of the Apostles who helps start the church.

B. Paul

1. had this whole impressive life as a super-smart Pharisee. Met Jesus on the way to Damascus and it turned his life upside down. Struck blind for three days (symbolic death). Experienced new life. Became the great Apostle Paul who wrote most of the New Testament and started lots of churches that then grew into what we know today. But the path there was through surrender to suffering, to a kind of death, and an experience of dependence upon God for his new life. This is all throughout his writings. Let's look at some of the things he has to say on it.
2. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11: ***8 We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. 9 In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. 10 And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. 11 And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.***
 - a) They are learning a whole new kind of dependence on God in the face of crisis. A few chapters later he says this:
3. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12: ***7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. 9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. 10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. 11 Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. 12 So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.***

V. Examples

1. **Richard Rohr.** *Falling Upward.* There are **two halves of life.**
 - a) First half is about **building the self**, building the ego structure, to use psychological language. Rohr calls this building the "container" of life. We do this through playing by the rules of our social structures. In Biblical Terms, we do through this through the Law. We build an identity as people who are mastering navigating the systems we are part of. That's the first half of life, and it's necessary to gain tools for the second half of life. We need to learn to stand in line, to raise our hands, to show up on time and turn in our work; pay our bills. It's necessary to learn impulse control. To learn submission. To learn that we're not the center of the universe and we can't just have our own way. We need to grow up from being toddlers. The first half of life helps us do that. But there's a second half of life.
 - b) **Second half is about letting go of the very thing we built.** This is a death of the constructed self/ego/false self so the true self can live. We have to let go of the container so we can experience the real contents inside. We learn that life isn't really about just being a good soldier. It's not about the righteousness we can earn for

ourselves. Showing up on time is important, but it doesn't make you a "good person". As Rohr says, "Don't confuse obedience to the law with loving God."

- (1) We fight the death of that container in every way. We've worked so hard to cultivate it, we're attached, and we confuse it with our very selves. We hate to die. We hate to suffer. But if we try to hang onto first half life too long, it is its own kind of suffering. Dissonance is too great, because life gets hard and protecting our ego in the midst of that is too much work.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German follower of Jesus, and a pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident in the 1940s. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he wrote this:
 - a) *"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ."*

When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow Him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call."
 - b) Bonhoeffer got this. He died to the structures that could protect his old life. Instead, he tried to take down Hitler. He followed Jesus even to death as he was killed in a German concentration camp (?)
3. **Transition in childbirth.** -
 - a) All three of my kids were born naturally. (Not at all a comment on how anyone else births, I just wanted to try it with Elliott, and then kept with it.) First labor was long and hard, and the most difficult part of labor is transition, as labor is ending and you're preparing to push baby out. In transition, there is a total loss of control. All you can do is surrender to the experience. Pain extremely isolating. Brought me to the end of myself. In Philippians, Paul talks about "fellowship with Christ in suffering". In that experience, I understood in a new way, what he meant.
 - b) **Jesus with me in the pain** in a way that no-one else could be. At the end, **I emerged different**. Not a scared little girl, but a mother. I have found God in my greatest moment of weakness, and with God I have made life. If that is possible, what could be impossible? What have I to fear about parenthood?
4. **Former Denomination** - As some of you know, before I moved to Berkeley to start what would become Haven, I had to separate from the denomination I was once a part of. I loved this group of churches, I had come to faith in Jesus within it. But in the year or so before my intended move here, it became clear that the denomination was choosing an exclusionary posture towards persons who self identified as LGBTQ, a posture with which I could not agree or support. I had hoped that there might be space for conscientious dissent; a way we could agree to disagree, perhaps, while we worked out our differences. But as conversations progressed it became more and more clear that this was not to be the case, and that reality felt like death to me.

You see, I had long dreamed, for over a decade at that point, and trained, and attended conference after conference, gone through discernment practice after practice, jumped through lots of administrative hoops, written papers, taken tests, gone through numerous interviews, to get to the place of being accepted and approved as a church planter in this group, and I was finally ready to go, the stamp of approval was on my move to Berkeley,

and now here we were at an impasse.

It all came to a head when after numerous emails and conversations, I had a sit down with the national leader in this organization who was my prime contact, the person who had the ultimate power to bless me or stop me from moving forward with the denomination. And as it became clear to him through our conversation that my position on the matter would not simply shift to match the denomination's newly stated position, he looked me and said forcefully, **"You have to decide if this is the hill you're willing to die on."**

The words felt like ice. I was taken aback by the idea that we could be talking in such stark terms as my death. But in that moment I told him the only thing I could say, "This is a journey I've been on for many years. As sure as I am of anything, it's that Jesus seems to be leading me on it. And I'm praying every day, if I'm in error, if I'm not going the way you want me to go, please show me. Be gracious with me. But unless I see clearly that Jesus is leading me to change direction, unless He tells me to turn around, I can't turn. **And if that means dying on a hill, then I guess that's what it means.**"

And that was that. And it did feel like death. I went through a season in the wake of those words that was the deepest grief I have yet felt. For months it was hard to pray. It was hard to get off the couch. It was hard to hope. And yet, again in my deepest suffering, I felt Jesus. If anyone knows death, Jesus, it is you. I felt that. You Jesus, are the only one who can really enter in here. You are not the God who is high and mighty and judges because I am not. Because I am weak. Because I suffer. Because I cannot make my suffering end by trying, by praying harder, by simply claiming victory over it. No, you are the God who stoops down. **You are the God who empties yourself of strength and might and succumbs to weakness.** The God who says yes to suffering. The God who surrenders to death. And so in that place of deepest darkness you are not far from me, **you are *with* me** in a way that no one can be. You're not a God who judges me for being covered in crap. **You're the one who crawls into the crap with me.**

- VI. And here's the most amazing miracle of all in this mystery: the crap, the **death is not the end**
- A. The story we are in is different than story science tells us, the story our secular life tells us - **you live and then you die.** (It's not wrong. It's "Little t truth"). **Big T truth: Our story as people of faith is you die and then you live.** And that life isn't pie in the sky someday. It begins now. Even while we breath. Even while our hearts beat...we die, and we find life.
 - B. **I have never really understood resurrection until I experienced the death of my dream and the birth of something better.** *This* is the something better. The container I was building for it needed to die in a sense, so the contents could really live, and be what they're supposed to be.
 - C. When the ego dies, when the part of ourself that tries to do it for ourself dies, when our need to control our outcome dies; then we can truly live in unity with God and creation. That life cannot be taken from us.
 - D. This too, is always in the hero's journey. The hero is transformed by his death experience. He is reborn on the other side of it. Emmet dies, and then comes back the master builder. Gandalf the Gray dies, and is reborn as Gandalf the White. Harry Potter dies, and returns free, unencumbered by his cursed connection to Voldemort. Jesus Christ dies and rises three days later with a body that bears the marks of his agony but that is impermeable to any more pain. Paul experiences the death of his former self and finds a new life of freedom and satisfaction and fulfillment in Jesus, even in the midst of prison.
 - E. Nothing left to fear because our hope isn't the protection of the false self. Our hope is in our life after death.

VII. Reflection as we close -

- A. Where are you in this? Have you experienced what I'm talking about? How can you reach out to God in that place?
- B. If you're not there, can you trust God to be with you when that phase comes?
- C. How can we be a community that makes space for people to go through Life maturing?