

CHILD-LIKE RESPONSE-ABILITY

“We spend the first half of our lives trying to become adults,” as someone older and wiser once noted, “and the last half trying to become children again.” It’s sad but true. Striving to “grow up and be responsible” at best makes us forget what it feels like to be a child; at worst, it makes us scorn the child—who is of course, too much like us: weak, needy, and powerless. What we disallow in ourselves, often we punish in others.

In a striking scene from the movie *Hook*, workaholic businessman Peter—who has forgotten that he’s in fact Peter Pan--and his pre-teen son are flying in an airplane. Out of boredom, the boy takes out his baseball mitt and begins to toss a ball up in the air. “Would you stop acting like a child!” the father explodes. “But Dad,” the boy protests, “I AM a child.” The rest of this marvelous film proceeds upon restoring the child—and thereby, destiny and power--in a man emasculated by his adult ambitions.

Why, oh why, does it take so long for us to see Jesus’ perspective on this?:

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus asking, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” So Jesus called a child to come and stand in front of them, and said, “I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child. And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me.” (Matt. 18:1-5TEV)

As we “grow up,” we respond to the demands of the world for jobs, money, control, esteem. And then, one terrifying day, you wake up and realize you haven’t welcomed the child in your heart; in fact, you’ve lost him/her. The wonder, the hope, the passion, the fun—and indeed, the humility which invites them--where did they go? In spite of your best efforts to appear “mature,” you find yourself yearning for more freedom, more fun, and more friends to play with. Someone asks, “What do you really want?” and you panic. You’ve spent so much time and energy responding to external “demands” that you’re no longer *able to respond* to your internal needs. In a tragic irony, your life may be completely in adult order—from low-rate mortgage to long-term insurance--but you’re no longer *response-able*.

Yet amazingly, graciously--amid the darkness we’ve wrought as ambitious accomplices in the world’s deception--the Father has provided a saving beacon of light living right here among us, whose faces shine forth with the rejuvenating truth of who we are, where we come from, and in fact, where we’re destined. This is the ministry of the child: like Jesus, the child comes to restore our innocence—and thereby, to make us *able to respond*, that is, *response-able*.

When we’ve dismissed and forgotten our true selves, when our compulsion to cover our shame has jealously mocked and crushed all innocence, children are ever born again among us as an exuberant witness to our created purpose and destiny—their open, humble, and trusting hearts beckoning the gateway to Heaven itself.

Children respond. They feel, and do something about it. They laugh, they cry. They experience life fully, and invite others into it. Like my 11-year-old son, they leap into the icy surf, feel the great waves crashing against them and shout to old hearts of all ages, “Come on in!” What’s more, children respond truthfully. Once, when my son was 5, I asked him to help me stuff envelopes with a flyer on my ministry material. “Is that how you trick people into buying your books?” he asked matter-of-factly. “Actually,” I offered lamely, “it’s called ‘advertising’.”

Ah, but such bearers of truth are an unwelcome threat to the kingdom of this world, where performance is the highest value and the shame of not measuring up is the primary motivator. In such a toxic environment, children “are to be seen and not heard”—as my grandmother often exhorted me as a boy. And the voice which beckons the Kingdom of Heaven—where God rules as King—is thereby silenced. Those who have forgotten the child cannot be *response-able* adults, because they are not *able to respond* openly to truth.

In this world, being responsible means providing for your own position and security. Its hallmark is industry, and its opposite, aimlessness. In the Kingdom of heaven, being responsible means being *able to respond* to God. Its hallmark is humility and its opposite, control. It means trusting that God has a plan for your life, and being *able to respond* as He reveals it. As John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-3), the voice of responsibility among Christians calls us to “prepare the way” for God’s coming work among us. It’s not “I can do it with your help,” but rather, “You can do it with my cooperation.” Practically, this means getting ready to walk in His destiny, and thereby, do your part to bring His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Begin with the basics, and honor the child. Take time to play. Talk to your Father, and listen to His Word. Sing out loud; worship freely. Quit hiding your shame and get real with Him and others. Get up in your Abba/Daddy’s lap and cry out your wounds to Him for healing. Like King David (Ps. 139:23-24), ask Him to search your heart, then confess your sins and celebrate the freedom of His mercy. Tell your Father you need His power, ask Him to release the fullness of His super-natural Spirit in your life (Mt. 3:11). In your church family, identify and learn to exercise your spiritual gifts. Get mad at the Enemy; renounce and cast out the demons that have seduced and oppressed you (Mk. 3:15). Enjoy your body; eat healthy, exercise regularly.

When we’re not response-able to God, we can respond only to the world. We grow tired, even angry. We either comply unto death and burn out, or rebel, like my generation as hippies in the 1960’s, and drop out. Today, at 60, I don’t have the energy any more to feed this vicious cycle. I’m tired—literally—of responding to the world. I want to rest in my Father, to hear His call, and be *able to respond* to Him with all the energy and focus He provides.

Get ready. God’s moving. It’s no time to be either industrious, aimless, or in control. It’s time to be response-able.