

[Slide 1 **kids being silly pics**] Talking to kids can be pretty hilarious. The way they describe how things work is always an entertaining exercise. Their minds work a little different than ours. This is why “Kids Say the Darndest Things” and shows like it get airtime on TV. Jimmy Kimmel has a recurring segment on his show where he asks kids questions and he gets some incredible answers.

On one episode he asked, “What’s the difference between boys and girls?” Of course there were some silly answers and some realistic ones. But the thing that was sure was that it was a little more complicated to explain than they expected.

Answers like boys are rough and girls are kind. Boys have thicker hair. One boy said the adam’s apple. that’s impressive right. Then one kid was having a real tough time.

He said with a good bit of certainty, “Girls like pink, boys don’t.” Jimmy responded, “Sometimes boys like pink.” He thought a minute and came up with an answer he thought was sure to be a winner, “Girls shop a lot, boys don’t.” Jimmy responded, “but sometime boys shop a lot.” His confidence waning a bit, he still had an answer he hoped would end this torture, “Boys like to watch TV a lot, and girls don’t.” Jimmy was surprised, “They don’t? Oh man. But some girls do.” The boy replied, “This is hard.”

This interaction points out something that we all know. Kids see things a lot more simply than we do. They can’t process on multiple levels. They deal only in right or wrong, yes or no, good or bad. Nuance confuses. So the other day, when my son Jacob so “Dang it!” I was like whoa buddy. Let’s not use that word. And he said, “Ok.” Now why did I tell him not to say that when the reason he says that word is because he’s heard me say it, right? Because it’s more complicated than that.

[Slide 2 **Jesus in heaven slide from 2 weeks ago**] This plays out in our discussions about Jesus as well. When Jacob tells me that he wants to see Jesus I tell him He’s in heaven. Or when I was told as a child, if I want to be in relationship with God, I invite Jesus into my heart. You’ve heard the term “Sunday school answers” right? That’s why they exist. It’s a way to simplify the way we talk about our faith into terms that a child can understand.

But, this is also the reason why, in my first religion class in college, my professor started by saying, “Everything you learned in sunday school is wrong.” He said this, not because our teachers were lying to us, but because it’s more complicated than that. And now that we were in college, it was time to begin thinking more deeply about our faith.

And this is a problem for most of us, because we’ve never really grown out of that. We feel like everything we do is an effort to get from here, this mundane secular existence, to there, some spiritual place in the sky where God will be happy with us. For many of us, that’s the reason we were given to do good works, and to live rightly. So we can be with God some day.

[Slide 3 **Jesus here slide from 2 weeks ago**] But the story of scripture is that God is not up there somewhere. He’s here, at work now. And, as we’ve talked about in this series already, how we live out our faith, and why we are so concerned about our calling, isn’t in an effort of getting from here to there, it’s not so that we can somehow get good enough, or do enough, that God will let us in, or give us seniority, or hierarchy, or more jewels in our crown. It’s actually because of how much we love.

[Slide 4 **pics of the interviewees**] Now, most of the time, we associate calling with crazy ideas, like having to move to Africa or something, or we look at it as just one more thing we have to put on the to do list. But look at the stories we've heard from our friends the last few weeks. Suzy doesn't work with the kids out of duty, Debbie doesn't teach out of obligation, and Brenda doesn't just cut hair merely to get a paycheck. They love what they do, and that's the beauty of calling. When you love, you're willing to do crazy things. It doesn't seem crazy to a lover. It seems necessary.

To me, that sounds like a much better motivation to pursue calling. To have a faith that transcends the divisions we make between "working hard" and "not enough" or "spiritual" and "unspiritual" to a faith that is in love with the world. Part of "growing up" in our faith means discovering and living out our calling.

In this series, we've been claiming that calling lies at the intersection of our loves and the needs in our world. Today we're going to find out that a grownup faith calls us to action because it flows from a love that is dangerous, reckless. A love that God has already shown to us.

[Slide 5 **Scripture Slide**] To see why this is important, turn with me in your bible or bible app to 1 Corinthians 13. If you grabbed one of the free bibles from the back it's on page XXX. If you don't own a bible, please keep that one as our gift to you.

We've been in the book of Corinthians the last few weeks and Paul, the writer, is really building to a fever pitch in this chapter. Two weeks ago, we read that the Spirit gives each of us different gifts, and that one is not better than the other. Our calling should however be for the common good. Last week, we heard how each of us, with our different gifts, all make up one body, we need everyone to work together to fulfill God's vision for the world. Don't spend your time pursuing the flashy gifts, but pursue those gifts that will be most helpful toward the body. So that our gifts are working toward one purpose... to bring the kingdom of heaven to the here and now.

[Slide 6 **3 groups of people, the middle group raised with an arrow below them**] The Corinthians, like many of us, saw the gifts as a way of reaching God, leaving here and going there. Specifically, they saw the gifts of tongues and prophecy as the highest gifts and so those are the ones that people were pursuing. The problem was they were pursuing these gifts, not for the common good, not to be the most helpful to the body, but out of vanity. They wanted to be seen among others as being the most wise, the most spiritual, the most whatever, and Paul is saying, if that's your reasoning for using these gifts, it's worthless. And even more, these "more spiritual" gifts don't reveal the whole picture. It's at best, a hazy reflection.

So what are we supposed to do? Just throw our hands up in the air and give up? A child might. A child would take their ball and go home. If we can't know if we're right or not, then what's the point? I mean, that's why I got into this whole religion thing in the first place. I wanted to make sure I was right, and now we're hearing we can't fully know? Well what ARE we supposed to do? I think Paul can help us out.

Follow along with me, starting at verse 1:

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NLT)

Now, it's no mistake that when Paul begins to deconstruct their understanding of the spiritual gifts, and the reason behind them, he goes right at the gifts the Corinthians valued most. He's not saying those gifts aren't important, but he's saying that calling is not just about gifting. Just because you have a certain gift or ability, doesn't automatically mean that you are following your calling. I mean, you can look spiritual doing it, but it doesn't mean it's legit. It's more complicated than that.

Let's be honest, it doesn't take someone with a calling to get up here and sing songs. It takes someone that can sing. I could get up here and sing all day, and I could close my eyes, and raise my hands with the best worship leaders on the planet. But if my whole motivation is to be on this stage to make myself look cool, or to feel like a rock star every Sunday, then it's worthless.

[Slide 7 5 year old sprang] I've been playing music since I was 5 years old. Piano, Trombone, Guitar and Singing have all been the way I express myself. It's always been a passion, a love. But when I was a junior in high school it became something more. I was at an early morning prayer time at the church building with some of my buddies, and our worship pastor was there, and he had his bible open and he was kneeling at one of the pews, the same pew that's still there in Jacksonville, FL. And as I saw him there it hit me like a ton of bricks. There would no greater honor for me than to use music to lead people to God.

Before we moved here, I talked with 4-5 other churches about going on staff there. And some of them were larger, more established churches. But I realized I couldn't reach the people God was calling me to reach if I just went to an established church. God was calling me to something radical. A church for people that don't like church. That's where my love met with the needs of the world around me. There were tons of churches doing church for church people. But there were very few, doing church in a way that would connect with people that weren't already use to church. And I knew this was where I needed to be.

My calling arose out of my love of music, and the needs of the unchurched. Where might your calling arise from? What needs might your loves be able to meet?

In the end, no matter what your gift is, because all gifts are needed and useful for the body right, the thing that keeps us moving in the right direction is love. More than having all the right answers, more than being able to pray with eloquent speech, more than having the deepest faith, more than dropping checks. So while we are pursuing our calling, while we're pursuing answers, and faith, and generosity, it must flow from no other motivation besides love.

But we have so many definitions of love. What specifically does Paul mean by love?

[Slide 8 Love, heart or wedding pic] This chapter in Corinthians is famously called the "love" chapter. Most of the time this particular piece of scripture is read publicly, it's done in a wedding

ceremony. And while these verses are important when discussing love in general terms, and so would apply to marriages, if this is the only way we read this scripture, then we are at risk of missing what Paul was speaking to in the first place.

When you read this chapter in its context, Paul is not talking marriage relationships, he's not talking about dating, he's not even talking about friendships, or loving others. He's talking about spiritual gifts.

Paul says love is...

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Does that sound like a person who is removed, distant, disengaged? No. It sounds like someone who is completely present, in the thick of the situation and totally engaged. It sounds like self-giving, sacrificial, lay it all on the line type of love. Much like our God loves us. In Jesus' death on the cross we see that He is totally engaged in our mess. He's not afraid of getting his hands dirty, and we shouldn't be either.

Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

(1 Corinthians 13:4-10, NLT)

[Slide 9 repeat the slide with the arrow up, 3 groups] Paul's saying, "People! It's good to pursue spiritual gifts. But you've been pursuing these spiritual gifts to elevate yourself and in turn distance yourself from others. The whole reason that God gives these gifts is for helping, and you're pursuing them in an effort to detach."

[slide 10 same slide but people groups on same level with arrows facing out, left and right, no longer up] Our real spiritual gifts, the ones from God, flow out of a love that compels us to act. Something moves us deeply, and causes us to find ways that we can help, that we can make a difference. Love keeps our gifts in the proper place, where our gifts turn into callings.

In all that we do, LOVE EXTRAVAGANTLY! The entire foundation of the gifts we've been given is love. These gifts are meant to join us to the body, and to God's purpose in the world. And the way we make sure that are on the right track in that endeavor, as we are pursuing our calling, is we love. Love is how we align ourselves with God, because God is love.

We can have great thoughts about them, even pray for them. But if it doesn't end up pushing us to respond to their needs, if we don't actually do something to help them, it's also meaningless. But love paired with the needs of others leads to true calling that can bring the perfect here.

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will

see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13:11-13, NLT)

As children, we have a tendency to measure ourselves against others. We look at all the gifts and abilities, and even how much we love, and we puff ourselves up in our heads saying, “We are better than they are because...” And Paul knows that this is the tendency. So as soon as he’s described that our gifts need love. He describes what kind of love he’s talking about.

... patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, proud or rude. It’s not constantly fighting for itself, or irritable, or keeping a tally sheet of those they’ve been wronged by. It doesn’t rejoice at injustice but at truth. It never gives up, or loses faith. It’s always hopeful and endures through everything.

Love that doesn’t spur you to action is mere sentimentalism. It makes love cheap. It doesn’t better the world, it only serves to make yourself feel better. The opposite of this is compassion. This is how calling connects to love. It’s the difference between being called somewhere or to something, and actually going. Love brings clarity. Love helps us grow up.

In this series, we’ve been hearing from some Catalyst people about their calling. This morning, we’re gonna hear from my good friend Adam how he allows his love for music to help him love the world around him.

VIDEO - Adam

Adam outro...

I hope that over the course of the last few months, and especially the last few weeks, You've been discerning your calling. You're beginning to name your loves. You've noticed needs in the world around you those loves are compelling you to meet. You're discovering life where you least expected it.

Calling is challenging to discern, not because it's hard, but because we've made it hard (by separating the world into spiritual and unspiritual). So here's an exercise as you continue to listen to the Spirit's call:

When you came in there was a card on your seat that has 4 questions on it, what we call a prayer of examen. This can be used by all of us, even if we already know our calling. The point of these questions are to help us love better. Perhaps one of the reasons that we struggle with our calling is because we don’t know what we love. Maybe we don’t know what we love because we are so busy just getting through the week, providing, taking care of, doing doing doing. *That would be great and all but I've got too much responsibility to worry about what I love.* This simple, daily set of questions is to help us see the world differently, more loving.

At the end of the day, we have a choice to make. We can just keep going about our life doing what we’ve always done, living a life without calling. It’ll pay the bills. But if we aren’t living into our

calling, and if we aren't loving others while we do it, then we are going to stunt our growth. We're gonna get stuck. And we know what that looks like. We know what that feels like, and it's not heaven.

But what if we all decided that we were going to pursue our loves? What if we ALL began looking for how our loves can align with the needs of our world? How fulfilling would that be? To know that we are working toward the perfection of the world. The perfect is coming. And we get to be a part of it's ongoing arrival by continuing to love extravagantly, not just with words, but with our gifts.

COMMUNION SETUP

We begin at the Communion Table. This table invites us back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed. During the meal, he broke bread and offered it to us as his body, broken for us. He offered us wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between God and humanity.

This meal is a reminder that, extravagant love for the world was displayed for us in Jesus. God so loved the world that he didn't remain distant and separate from us. He came near to us. Now it's our turn. God invites you to love the world, so that your calling can be revealed.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion. If you want to love the world more and more so that God can reveal how he wants to use you to bring heaven here, then you're welcome to come to the table today.

BENEDICTION

Catalyst, may we be a people who pursue our calling, not in an effort to elevate ourselves, but to benefit the world. May we see that we have every spiritual gift we need as we eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. May he keep us strong to the end so that we will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.