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TURN ASIDE

Programming a video game must be a pretty intense task. At seemingly every instant a player has one of at least four options: forward, back, left, or right. If he is going down a hallway those might be limited to the first two. However, when he reaches another hallway his options go up again. The outcome of the game may depend on which option the player chooses. To simplify matters, if the player is going forward in a hall, he may pass a chest. He now has two options: proceed or open the chest. The chest may contain treasure or weapons. It may contain something to restore or enhance his strength. On the other hand, it may contain poison, or a bomb, or something else that could make him lose the game. So the option remains. Does he open the chest or not? People face similar choices in life. Moses did.

Moses was walking along minding his own business, which is to say he was minding his sheep. As he walked along he saw a bush. The bush was on fire. There might be any number of things to cause a bush in the middle of a deserted place to catch fire. Maybe a passing animal dislodged a rock, which struck another, which caused a spark, which set a dry bush on fire. Nothing exceptionally remarkable about that. Moses could proceed on his way. But Moses turned his head. He looked.

When he looked, Moses noticed that the fire did not consume the bush. Now this is a different matter altogether. This might be a treasure. This might be something worth investigating; or it might be a problem. Moses was faced with a decision. Continue, or investigate. Follow the sheep, or follow a different path. Instead of just looking, Moses turns off of his path. Not only that, he speaks to himself, which may have been an occupational hazard of eighty-year-old shepherders. "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." (Ex 3:3) He made an active choice to alter his direction, and thus altered his life.

"And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses." (Ex 3:4) What would have happened if Moses had not turned aside? What if Moses had just turned his head, but kept going? This verse seems to indicate that nothing would have happened. Looking back,

we can probably say the programmer (who was in the bush) would have found someone else to step aside. After all, Aaron was already on his way to meet Moses (Ex 4:14); maybe he would have changed his path. As far as Moses is concerned, however, if he had not turned aside, nothing would have happened. He would have contentedly continued as a shepherd, perhaps for another forty years. He would not be the great hero of faith that he became. In fact, he probably would be one of the many names forgotten to history. But he turned aside, and God reacted to his reaction. God spoke to him.

All of this begs a simple question. Do we fail to hear God speak because we don't stop and choose to alter our paths? Curiosity may be inborn in people, but it is usually overbalanced by a sense of habit. We take the same road to work every day. We watch the same television shows at the same times. We eat the same foods on particular days. We go to bed at the same time, arise at the same time, and live our lives the same way every day of every week of every year. And if something comes along that is curious, we may remark on it, but most people will not turn aside for it. Drop a penny (or some other virtually insignificant coin in another country) on the sidewalk. Then wait to see how few people would stop to pick it up.

In the same way, most people do not listen to God because God never talks to them. God never talks to them because he is just a little off the path, waiting in a burning bush. It is only those who step out of their rut to whom he speaks. But when he speaks, it can be a treasure to the person who turns. Three steps may be all it takes. But be careful. As with Moses, a conversation with God could alter the course of your whole life.

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CHILDPROOF YOUR LIFE

All new parents are faced with a problem: “childproofing” their home. This may involve moving breakables to a higher shelf, covering all electrical outlets, putting latches on lower cabinets and drawers, and putting rubber bumpers on all sharp corners. No matter how diligent a parent is, there is usually something that they miss that ends up as at least a minor emergency. Experts say that there is only one way to effectively eliminate the majority of hazards that a toddler might face—get down on your hands and knees and view each room from the level of a child. Only in this way can you observe some things that might not be as obvious from an adult’s eye level. Is there something under that table or chair that could interest a child? Is that priceless Ming vase really out of the child’s reach? Should I hide that cord that I didn’t notice when I scanned the room from my normal height? Things look a lot different when we are on our knees.

There are some lessons that we might learn from such an exercise, beyond the obvious one that the carpet needs cleaning. There are some spiritual applications to getting down to the child’s level. “Whosoever therefore

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shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 18:4)

Through a child’s eyes

The first lesson might be that we need to humble ourselves. Have a childlike view of the world. Well, maybe not the selfishness of a child, but certainly the childlike wonder. God has given us a marvelous creation. Many people go through the day as if God’s gifts are pretty ordinary. Sure, everyone can make a mountain or a flower. No. “Poems are made by fools like me,/ But only God can make a tree.” (*Trees*, by Joyce Kilmer) Jewish law prescribes *berakhot* (prayers) for many things. There are a number of prayers to be recited when seeing the wonders of nature, a rainbow, a beautiful/handsome person, a tree

in bloom. An awareness of, and compliance with, these requirements may cause one to see nature as a child sees it, and to acknowledge the creator of it all. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.” (Ps 19:1) When we realize that the creation declares God, we must necessarily be humbled. Like a child, we are dependent on the creator for everything; but like a child with a loving parent, we have a father who gives us everything that is good.

There is a park in Europe that has a room in which all the furniture is scaled so that a normal adult sees it as a child would. To sit in a chair, an adult has to climb. It is designed to make anyone feel small. That should be our reaction to the grand scale of this world God has given us. It is too big for us. Instead some people worship the large room.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. (Rom 1:20-22)

Our reaction to the creation ought to be toward the creator, not the creation. When we worship things, or men, or concepts we overstep the bounds of viewing the world like children. We make God in our image, rather than acknowledging that we are made in his image.

Having a child’s strength

A second lesson from getting on our knees may be that we are powerless before God. When in the presence of the creator of the universe, we are as if we had no strength. Like the child that says, “my father can beat up your father,” we must rely on someone else for our protection.

The Israelites felt this way at one point during the exodus from Egypt. Unfortunately for them, it was not before God that they felt helpless. “And we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.” (Num 13:33) They felt themselves to be weak in front of some puny little giants. Because of this they chose not to enter the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb, on the other hand, felt the smallness of the giants in relation to God, and reported, “the Lord is with us; fear them not.” (Num 14:9) They knew that the smallness of the Israelites

in comparison to the giants was nothing compared to the smallness of the giants in comparison with God. It was like comparing a child to an adult rather than comparing an adult to Mount Everest.

A common theme in both Egyptian and Mayan art is conquest. In both cultures it is not uncommon to find a painted or carved panel depicting a victory by the nation creating the panel. A common scene, in both cultures, would have the conquering king standing on kneeling figures of the conquered peoples. When we get down on our knees, as if to examine a room from child level, we should be taking an attitude of surrender to God. He is the great and powerful one. (Not like the great and powerful Oz, who was just a fraud.) We cannot defeat him, so we ought rather to yield.

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom 6:13-14)

When we are on our knees we acknowledge that we have but a child's strength. Nevertheless, from our knees, whether figuratively or literally, we can ask for God's strength. Perhaps when we are on our knees in prayer we are the strongest we will ever be. "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." (1 Chron 16:11) When a nation is under threat of attack, the ruler may often call on others to aid him. Such alliances are what led to two World Wars. But an alliance is only as good as the power of the ally. If they are weak, the country is best off without them. "If allies are strong with power to protect me, / Might they not protect me out of all I own?" (*The King and I*, Oscar Hammerstein II) When our ally is God, we have the strongest, safest, surest alliance. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31)

God took a child's view

God wanted to childproof his home. He wanted to make his home appropriate for his creation. To understand fully the nature of that willful being he had created, even God needed to get down on his knees to see things as we see them.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a

merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Heb 2:14-18)

God is our creator. He knows somewhat of our nature. But one thing that God could not understand about us: since he "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man," (Jas 1:13) God could never fully understand our propensity to sin. It is like the singer with perfect pitch; she finds it difficult to understand the person who cannot sing a lick.

Jesus "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Php 2:6-8) He did this so that he might understand temptation. He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15)

This is the ultimate example of getting down on one's knees to view a room from a child's point of view.

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When a parent does so, he is really viewing the room at a child's level, from an adult's viewpoint. Thus even when we do this, we often miss things with which a child might hurt himself. An adult might overlook a sharp corner, because he is not in the mindset of one who might fall. He might forget to try to open the refrigerator or not think that an unlocked toilet might be a temptation. He is not programmed to think in those terms. To childproof the home effectively, he has to change not only his level, but also his way of thinking. God, on the other hand, not only viewed humanity from our level, but also from our viewpoint. He became one of us, so that he could protect us from the dangers of our world. Jesus had the ability to sin. Otherwise temptation would not be temptation. He was in every way tempted as we are, so that he could understand us fully. When he emptied himself, he got down on his knees. He became like us, so that we might be like him. Freedom from sin; that is the greatest childproofing yet.

OUR DAILY BREAD

It was a time of uncertainty for all Americans. Times had been good. Prosperity was not just around the corner; for many it had arrived. Not only was there a chicken in every pot, there was a stove under each of those pots. But through the summer the signs of economic collapse were evident to those who would look. In October, the stock market took a nosedive. By December people were talking about a serious recession. People were losing jobs. Home foreclosures were up. The Christmas retail numbers were the worst in many years. Even in a season when people normally give to charities that provide food to the needy, donations were down, and utilization was up. It was not a good time.

The people were homeless. They lived in their automobiles, if they were lucky enough to have one. They packed all their meager belongings and moved to where there were supposed to be jobs. But because everyone was moving to where there were supposed to be jobs, there were no more jobs. People stood on street corners and in parks, showing signs asking for a job, or just a handout. They couldn't go home. They had spent all they had to move, and there was nothing to move back to, anyway. The soup kitchens and homeless shelters were not sufficient for the numbers of newly homeless people. It was not a good time.

While that first paragraph was written with 1929 in mind, it could also apply to 2008. The second paragraph may be about the dust bowl era, but some might also see today in it. It also could apply to poorer parts of the United States, or the world, at almost any time. There are people, even in times of prosperity, that

don't know whether they will have a meal today, much less the rest of the week.

Americans and many Europeans have forgotten what it was like (if we ever knew it), when the next meal was purchased at the grocery store or the stalls that day. Western culture, and even that of many previously "backward" nations, has led us to believe that we have a right to have a week's worth of meals in the house, unless we choose to eat at a restaurant where we can choose from a wider menu of meals. Yet even in times like those described, there are people among those who are most seriously effected by the economic downturn, who consider that things are no different today than they were yesterday.

The people in the Middle East about 2,000 years ago would never understand this culture. People who earned a wage got paid by the day, and each day. They counted on the daily wage to buy the daily food. Thus when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to say, "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matt 6:11) We need to rely on God on a daily basis.

The faithful people are those that believe that God did not promise our monthly bread. Whether I have much or have little, it comes from God. Life is short. It may be shorter than we think. A full larder does not guarantee a next meal. Maybe we should be praying for our daily bread. If God gives us our bread for today, at least we know we are alive to eat it. It could be that a prayer for daily bread is more a prayer for receiving the day, because God's people know that he will give us the bread.

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