

SLAVE TO CHILD

INTRODUCTION

Ever had a DTR? In most relationships, there is an awkward season when each person starts to feel something more, but neither one wants to be the first to admit it. So finally, a time comes when you simply must have a “Define the Relationship” (DTR) conversation. From the moment you have a DTR, the relationship changes. It goes up or down. The pace quickens or slows. You look at the other person differently. You talk to them differently. You start taking an ownership in the way they look and feel. You move from knowing about them to *really* knowing them.

There is such a thing as a DTR with God. We call it Slave to Child. It is a fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and relate to God. After your DTR with God, the pace of your Christian life quickens. You look at him differently. You talk to him differently and start taking an ownership in the way he looks and feels. You move from knowing about him to really knowing him.

Let’s return to our story of the disciples following Jesus along the way, and look for that moment when he defines the relationship.

TEXTUAL WORK: BECOMING A CHILD

The way the disciples followed Jesus along the way and argued over which of them was the greatest shows that they did not yet have Christ’s mind. In the heat of that debate, Jesus sat them down, put a child in front of them, and said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37).

Matthew put it differently: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). To “change” (*metanoia*) is to turn the other way (Matt. 5:39), to change your mind about something (Acts 7:42), or to change your form (Rev. 11:6). Jesus was telling them that they had to change and become something different.

Note: You can play on this fact—Jesus told the disciples who had followed him for two years that they still had to change. It is a message that even the most devout among us need to hear.

A couple days (one chapter) later, the matter of children came up again. This time, the people brought their children to Jesus and “the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.’” Then he said, “Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:13–15).

Most commentators suggest that Jesus was telling us to act like children (trusting, innocent, humble, etc.). But Jesus never told us to *act* like children. Instead, he told us to *become* like children. He was describing something deeper than virtue: our very nature and way of approaching God. He said that unless they changed (converted) and became like children, the very disciples who had been following and obeying him for two years might still miss the kingdom of God.

Jesus said that there is something *beyond* discipleship. He was telling them to become like children, as though that was more than being a disciple.

Once again, Jesus and his disciples were of two different minds. The disciples were worried that the children were getting in the way, and Jesus was worried that the disciples were

not like children. The shift from following Jesus to loving Jesus is a shift from Slave to Child.

Note: You may refer to other places in the Gospels where Jesus emphasized the father-child relationship that we are to have with God (see Matt. 5:45, 48; 6:4, 6, 9, 18, etc.).

IMPLICATION: TO BE A SLAVE

While every generation tries to avoid the mistakes of the past, each is just as adept at inventing new forms of slavery. For instance, one generation will focus on rules and become legalistic, while the next will abandon the rules altogether and get caught in addiction. One generation is addicted to their performance (everything has to be perfect), and the next generation defies that and becomes addicted to entitlements (I deserve the best). *Give a few examples of things you have seen or read in your personal ministry and study.*

What are some modern forms of slavery?

Slavery to Rules

As long as we serve God and cannot love him as a father, we are slaves. Good slaves, but still slaves. *Give examples of some ridiculous rules you have seen or heard people keep in order to be “good enough.”*

Slavery to Others’ Expectations

Brennan Manning called these people imposters and wrote, “Imposters are preoccupied with acceptance and approval. Because of their suffocating need to please others, they cannot say no with the same confidence with which they say yes. And so they overextend themselves in people, projects, and causes, motivated not by personal commitment but by the fear of not living up to others’ expectations” (see *Abba’s Child*, p. 34).

Slavery to Addictions

We start out seeking pleasure and end up needing it. Every pleasure is a foretaste of freedom and joy, but it is fleeting and makes us want more. *Give an example of someone you know who sought pleasure and ended up being a slave.*

Think of any other forms of slavery and add them to the list. Spend a few moments imagining what it would be like to become an authentic child of God. How are these forms of slavery holding us back? What would it take to be a genuine child of God?

APPLICATION: MOVING FROM SLAVE TO CHILD

There are many ways to move from Slave to Child. The more you are around people who live as children and the healthier the community to which you belong, the easier it is to make the shift. But here are two things that can help.

Practice Listening to God's Voice

Take up the Word of God and read it carefully. Memorize it. Meditate on it. Internalize it. Create a margin in your life for spending time reading the Bible slowly. Start with the story of the prodigal son. Which character are you: the one who left or the one who stayed home? Both are forms of slavery, aren't they?

Practice Speaking to God

Think of these as little notes that you leave lying around for the Father to read. *Note: Share times when you (or a friend) found notes from your children (such as: "You're a great mom!" or "Dad, you're the best!"), and how it showed your children's love.*

CONCLUSION

In his book *Capital of the World*, Ernest Hemingway wrote about a father in Spain who had a son named Paco. Because of his son's rebellion, Paco and his father were estranged. The

father was bitter and angry with his son and kicked him out of the home. After years of bitterness, the father's anger ended, and he realized his mistake. He began to look for Paco with no results. Finally, in desperation, the father placed an ad in the Madrid newspaper. The ad read: "Paco, all is forgiven. Meet me at the newspaper office at 9 A.M. tomorrow. Love, your Father." Paco is a rather common name in Spain, and Hemingway wrote that when the father arrived the next morning, there were six hundred young men named Paco waiting and hoping to receive their father's forgiveness.

This is how God wants us to come to him. Maybe you are hurt. Maybe he hasn't fixed you. Or maybe you have forced your image of an earthly father onto God. While you protest, he carries you and patiently waits for you to come home.