

"Please Call Back Later, Lord."

*There's always a better time...
isn't there?*

BY GORDON MACDONALD

A part of me sensitive to destiny
has often heard Christ's call to follow:
To see reality from a new perspective,
to live generously and mercifully,
to do special, costly things
which center on the unique and unusual.

But to hear is one thing.
To respond correctly is another.

As a teen I first heard the call.
I was relieved to find that
its impact could be neutralized
by reminding my soul
that there was time
enough to follow
after I had been licensed to drive,
permitted to date,
and had reached the status
of a social heavyweight.



In later youth Christ beckoned again.
This time I waved Him off,
saying that I would need more time to mature,
to explore alternative worldviews,
to discover my own identity.
"Perhaps after these adventuresome years,
when I'm really grown up," I said,
"when life becomes serious business,
I will have more time for religious responsibility."

During my college days I heard Christ call again.
He asked me, as usual,
to go and live, do and give.
But I was armed with a counter-proposition—

that He back off until another day,
perhaps when I was married, settled down.
Then it would be easier, I reasoned,
to be Christ's disciple,
when I have a mate
who is prepared to pursue
the spiritual side of things.

But after college there came
graduate school
and career planning and job
searching.
There were business trips, cross-
country transfers,
and weekend getaways.
And, sometime amid the busyness
of all that,
Christ once again intruded,
whispering to my destiny
the same old subject, the same
old call.

With sincerity, I asked for one more exemption
in the decision-making process.

Singles, I pointed out, need space.
They value freedom, independence, and security,
and they prefer not to be tied down
with long-term responsibility
or to Someone who tells them what to do.
At this point in life,
options are a thing to be kept open
on a moment-by-moment basis.
Well, I think Christ mumbled something
about understanding my thinking.
But I'm not positive.

Christ is tenacious about these calls of His,
and that's why I was somewhat irritated when,
after I'd walked an aisle, taken some vows,
enjoyed a honeymoon, I heard His voice again.
"There will be a time *after*,"

I insisted with reverential firmness,
"when my spouse and I have had the opportunity
to really know each other, to have some kids,
invest in a house, visit Europe,
and open a Charles Schwab investment account.
Then, Lord," I said, "you'll be seeing a lot of us.
We will have to offer some spiritual life
to our children.

They ought to grow up in a church.
But, until they're of age, I'll keep my schedule free
and my money in ample quantity."

Kids did come, as they usually do,
and they did cost!
Now when I say *cost*,
I'm talking about *money* (especially that),
time (kids are so demanding), and *energy*
(I'm pooped at the end of every day).

I said, when I next encountered
the calling of Christ,
"Lord, please wait a little longer for me,
until we get these kids through college,
until I can cut down on my work hours,
until I get over this problem with my weight,
this frustration in my marriage,
and this move we want to make to Arizona.
Perhaps after these hassles and the tuition bills
subside,
we'll have plenty of occasions, cash, and,
perhaps with little else to do,
some energy that You probably very badly need."

At 58 or 62, whatever, I've now stopped counting,
Christ came to see me once more.
I must admit that His call was impressive,
but what He did not take into account
was that I needed rest, not responsibility,
needed freedom, escape
from the rigors of the years.

"Lord," I said, "we've done our part.
Let the young people take over now.
It's time for us to protect ourselves.
Retirement, you see, is just a few years away,
and we need to be sure that we're financially secure.
Read the *Journal*;
it's a rough time,
a turbulent economy."

It's only an opinion,
but it sure seems to me that
Christ
could headhunt for His
disciples among the
teenagers,
the college students,
the singles, and those fresh,
energetic young couples
whose kids are just in
diapers.
And anyway, they're the ones
who profit
from all this spirited effort.
We've paid our dues.

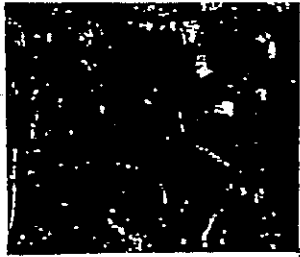
And then, just the
other day,
when I turned 78,
I began to meditate on why
my soul had always seemed
so empty.
Why was I drowning in such
disappointment?

Why did I feel as if I had no legacy?
And then there was Christ.
Why hadn't He used me when I was younger?
And why was there no excitement over the possibility
that one day I might stand in His presence
and hear His evaluation of how I'd spent
my days, my money, and my affection.

Today, I no longer drive,
my eyes won't pass the driving test.
Now, I tend to forget a lot of what I learned in college.
Our busy, busy kids, long gone and married,
live 2,000 miles away and very rarely visit.
I have plenty of time now,
should anyone need me,
but I'm so alone and there's little to do.
No one seems to ask about anything:
who I am
how I feel
where I see things going
why I think as I do
what I could contribute.

No one asks . . .
no one calls,
not even Christ. ♦

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Lexington, Massachusetts. He is the author of numerous books, his most
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