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The Genealogy of Genius - Seed the Clouds
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In 1468 a 14 year old boy named Leonardo, moved from the town called Vinci 60 miles east to apprentice for a man named Andrea del Verrocchio. Florence, Italy was not a large city, about 40,000 people, but it had a high concentration of creatives. There were more woodcarvers than butchers 83 to be exact. Now, Florence was an incubator for artists and the catalysts were creative collaborations called workshops. There were 54 of them and one of them was Verrocchio's workshop. Now, for what it's worth in case you care, much of the art produced by these workshops during the renaissance is not signed because they weren't done by one artist, they were collaborations by these workshops, art was a team sport. And so Leonardo must've enjoyed his apprenticeship because four years later he decided to stay. For 10 years he worked in Verrocchio workshop, and at some point the apprentice became the master. Verrocchio and Leonardo collaborated on a painting called the Baptism of Christ. I've got a picture of that painting and I want you to notice the two angels. The Angel on the right is Verrocchio's angel, the angel on the left Leonardo's angel. Now, I am not an artist nor an art historian, but the consensus is that Leonardo's angel is more angelic. Now, what's interesting is that Verrocchio was so awed by his protégé the product of Leonardo's paintbrush that he quote, "resolved never again to touch a brush." The student has become the master. Question. Who is the greater genius? If we're talking about pure artistic talent? Oh, it's Leonardo, hands down. But there is a genius that can spot genius, the genius that can pull genius out of others and without that genius, a lot of geniuses go undiscovered. Lots of potential goes untapped, lots of talent is wasted, lots of opportunities are left on the table. So hold that thought. We'll come back to it in a few minutes.

This weekend we continue our series seed, the clouds. If you have a Bible or a phone, you can turn to 1 Kings 18, and we'll start in verse 41. Two weeks ago I talked about seeding the clouds with humility, positivity, and generosity. Last weekend our campus pastors talked about seeding the clouds with good old fashioned obedience with consecration by taking steps of faith and I want to take a little different angle this weekend.

It says, ⁴¹ *Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go get something to eat and drink, for I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!"* Prophets hear things that others do, not hear. ⁴² *So Ahab went to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees.*

Do you have a mental image of this? Is this how you pray? This is a very interesting posture. Now, different commentators have different opinions on it and I don't want to read too much into it. Well, my friends, this is not, God is great, God is good. Let us thank him for our food. Let's eat. This is something different than that. Here's what I know for sure, prayer is the difference between you fighting for God and God, fighting for you. The battle belongs to the prayer, to the Lord, but it's when we pray, so when we hit our knees that God extends his hand. For the record it had not rained in three and a half years. Elijah isn't praying, Elijah is interceding for rain.

Now, a few years ago I wrote a book called *The Circle Maker*. Wonderful story about Honi the circle maker, drought in the first century. They asked Honi to pray and what does he do? He draws a circle in the sand with the staff then he kneels in that circle and he said, Sovereign Lord, I swear before your great name that I will not leave this circle until you have mercy upon your children. That is a bold prayer. If it doesn't rain, you're going to be there a long time, but God honors bold prayers because bold prayers honor God. And it's how we seed the clouds and in this case, literally the Sanhedrin, by the way, called it the prayer that saved a generation. Now I want you to hear me. Posture is not an abracadabra. God cares much more about the posture of our hearts than body posture. But Elijah puts his head between his knees and praise like it depends on God.

Can I just tell you that there had been times in my life when words don't cut it and I pray in the spirit and I pray with tears and I pray by kneeling at an altar, sometimes I suck carpet. I face down because God, I'm desperate. I love the way our Pastor of Prayer Heidi Scanlon puts it. She calls it contending prayer. That's what this is. Elijah is contending in prayer, and prayer is the difference between letting things happen and making things happen, so why don't we see what happens.

Verse 43, then Elijah said to his servant, go and look toward the sea. The servant went and looked, then returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything."

Can I tell you what I told our leaders this weekend? I said, even when you don't have any visual evidence of God at work, I promise you God is watching over his word to perform it. Jeremiah 1:12, *he who began a good work, will carry it to completion*. But sometimes we have to do what Elijah did, we have gotta keep seeding the clouds.

And it says; *Seven times Elijah told him to go and look.* ⁴⁴ *Finally the seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a man's hand rising from the sea." Then Elijah shouted, "Hurry to Ahab and tell him, 'Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don't hurry, the rain will stop you!'"* ⁴⁵ *And soon the sky was black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel.*

Few months ago I got an email from NCCer, she gave me permission to share it. It was the day we began our 40 day prayer challenge do you remember this, at the beginning of lent. And that same day she interviewed for a job at the office of Management and Budget. Now, this came on the heels of two months of phone interviews, emails, security checks, reference checks, long process, frustrating, process, some you have been there and done that, you get that in this town. But I love what Jessica did. She decided to seed the clouds, how? By circling the new executive office building once a day for seven days, why not the Israelites did it at Jericho? And here's what she said. On day seven, the secret service had blocked off Pennsylvania Avenue because a foreign head of state was visiting, so it was a much longer circle, in fact, it was 12 times the distance on the day that she circled seven times. She said, after 14 kilometers, three hours, some refreshing rain, and a few sideways glances from secret service, I finished. She said I felt humbled. I felt empowered. I felt exhausted. I began that circle at 3:34 PM on March 6, 23 hours later at 2:39 PM. On March 7, I received a phone call from the director offering me the job. What

was Jessica doing besides getting some really good exercise? She was seeding the clouds. That's what prayer does. Now it has to be in the will of God for the glory of God.

And listen, I have as many disappointments as you do, but also has some miracles on my prayer resume that God has done. And this is not about certainly some selfish desire in prayer. This is about doing what Elijah did. Can I just say this? 700 days ago I challenged this church to pray the bravest prayer. We're in a series called Mountains Move and it's a day I will never forget. Let me tell you what the bravest prayer is. Its prayer you've prayed 100 times that God has not answered. And I said, for me the bravest prayer would be that God would heal my asthma. You know, I count the days, right? Seven hundred days today, God healed my asthma. I have not touched in inhaler since. But I prayed a lot of the times; I didn't even see a cloud the size of a man's hand. But you know what? God never released me from it. And so if he doesn't release you, you keep praying. You keep seeding the clouds and you see what God does. I love what Jessica shares at the end of her email, she says, Pastor Mark, that prayer walk was one of the most humbling things I've done. The thing I learned is that God didn't need me to circle those blocks seven times in order to break down a wall around OMB. He needed me to circle those blocks, seven times to break down a wall within me to bring me, to a place of humility and total dependence upon him and prepare me for the next step of faith, little or big.

Can I challenge you to pray the bravest prayer? Nothing seeds the clouds like prayer. I thought this was going to be the whole message. I thought we're just going to have some fun unpack this and boom. But, I made the mistake of reading the next chapter. I think this is half of the equation, I think prayer. Listen, you got to pray to make it today. You got to seed, wow. Listen, I am a child of the eighties and that just happened. It just... You know, isn't that crazy? Like your synapses. Boom. Somewhere in the deep recesses, you know, just too legit to quit. All right?

I want you to turn one chapter, 1 Kings 19, verse 14. Now Elijah hears the voice of God. Do you remember this? It wasn't in the wind, wasn't in the earthquake, wasn't in the fire. It was a still small voice, a gentle whisper. Make a good book, wouldn't it? Now listen to what the voice says. *What are you doing here, Elijah?* Now when God asks this kind of question, it's not so that God can figure out what Elijah's doing there. God is asking the question so that Elijah can figure out what Elijah is doing there. Okay?

And then Elijah says, *"I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."*

Can I just say this? I don't know why. I mean, it's just kind of encouraging to me. Nice to know that even prophets throw pity parties, right? That even prophets get discouraged. That even prophets have bad days. I mean, come on, this is coming off of this incredible Mount Carmel showdown, right, with 450 prophets of Bale and [inaudible] he hits bottom.

And what does the Lord say? *"Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. ¹⁶ Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet."*

Now, here's the thing. I don't think what's happening is like Elijah; you're out of the job now. You just got fired. I think what's happening here is he's changing his paradigm. Elijah, it's not just about you and your miracles, it's about what's next. It's about who's next? Who are you anointing? That's the question.

So let's go back to where we started. Leonardo da Vinci, genius. Andrea del Verrocchio, a genius who could spot genius, and that is the genius of Jesus. Is it not? Now, here's the thing. I love what Dallas Willard said. He said, today, we think people are smart who make light bulbs and computer chips and rockets out of stuff already provided. He made the stuff. I like that. All things were created by him and for him. Without him, nothing was made that has been made and he did it Ex nihilo, out of nothing, that is creative genius. His parables, genius, his miracles, genius, turning water into wine, genius, walking on water, genius, healing a man born blind, genius, resurrected a man four days dead, genius. But there was another kind of genius, come on. The disciples were not first round draft picks. They are undrafted free agents, but Jesus sees something in them, and I love this about Jesus because he sees it in you, he sees it in you. He sees this impetuous fisherman named Simon with a short fuse and a thick skull, and he says you're the rock. Changes his name changes his identity, sees the genius and calls it out of him.

I love this story, where crazy story in the Gospels where, I mean, it sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but a prostitute crashes a party at a Pharisee's house. I mean, part of me is like party and Pharisee, how fun could that have really been? Like boring, right? Like, get me out of here. When is this party going to end? And then his prostitute walks in and this is so great because I think we just read over these nuances. She breaks open an alabaster jar, so like the whole place is smelling like this perfume and then she does something that like, people just don't do this. Has anyone ever wash your feet with their tears and their hair? I mean, right? Like, I mean, this is crazy. Now it's a party up in here. Now it got interesting. Now we're having a little bit of fun. I love. Listen to what the Pharisee says. You can tell a lot about a person by their language. Language reveals paradigm and prejudice. He says, if this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner. No, no, no, no. If he was a prophet, he would know what kind of woman she could be. That's the difference. You have the Pharisee's fault finders, right, and you have Jesus who just had this way of catching people doing things right and then bragging about them behind their back.

I love what Jesus said: *"Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

Here we are 2000 years removed, 6,000 miles away, and what she did has been told about her once again. Here's the difference between the Pharisees and Jesus. Pharisees always writing people off. Jesus, always writing people in. The Pharisees reduce people to a label. She is a what? A sinner. And Jesus with grace and truth removes that label and I think reveals who she really is, the apple of God's eye and the very image of God. That's what Jesus did. That's what prophets do.

Now, let's go back to Elijah. There is a genealogy to genius and you can see this in so many different arenas. In football it would be called a coaching tree, in science it would be called a mentoring chain, and I love studying these things. I'm fascinated by kinda who begat who and

begat who and begat who kind of intellectually or in so many different ways. It's fascinating stuff to me, but all of that, to say this, Elisha doesn't become an Elisha without Elijah, like this doesn't happen in a vacuum. Now, yes, Elijah prayed like it depends on God and that's how miracles happen. I think it's how Jessica got her job. You got to pray and then you've got to pray through, seed the clouds. But after you pray, like it depends on God, I think you also have to disciple like it depends on you. Prayer is how God does miracles in you, but please hear me. Discipleship is how God does miracles through you. Let me give you a definition of discipleship. It's growing fruit on someone else's tree. By the way, Elijah, his curriculum vitae as a prophet, 14 miracles. And then what happened? Elisha asked for a double portion. Do you remember that? How many miracles did Elisha perform? Twenty-eight. Double anointing, double portion, and I don't think Elijah's legacy was his 14 miracles. I think it was the fruit that he grew on, someone else's tree. That's what Jesus did with the 12 disciples. Sure, he taught them to pray the Lord's Prayer. We had a series on it just a couple of months ago, but he also spent three years doing what? Discipling them. That's why they're called disciples.

Here's a way to think about this because the Day of Pentecost, just a couple of weeks ago, like, man, how did that happen? Right? Boom. It's the birth of the church infilling of the spirit. It's the key, right, to this whole thing. Let me think about it this way. The three years that Jesus spent discipling the disciples, he was seeding the clouds and let's just call it a low pressure front. And then the disciples get in an upper room and they pray for 10 days and why don't we call that a high pressure front? Now what happens when a low pressure of discipleship and a high pressure of prayer meet each other? There's probably going to be a little windstorm, kinda like what happened on the Day of Pentecost. There's going to be an outpouring of God's spirit. And so it's these two things that I think we see in the life of Elijah. Let me just make this personal. I wouldn't be who I am or where I am if it weren't for a spiritual father by the name of Dick Foth. He and Ruth were part of our original 19, 22 years ago. He took this rookie pastor under his wing and he mentored me and disciplined me, loved me, encouraged me. You know, we never once went through a curriculum. Our curriculum was life. You know how every time we met, how it would start, he would ask me how I'm doing. Actually, no. He would ask me how Lora and the kids are doing because he said that would give a much better read on how I'm doing as a father and a husband. A lot of wisdom right there.

Now, part of me doesn't even know how to share this, but it's a moment I won't forget and this is my spiritual family, so I think it's okay for me to share it. Last summer I was out in California, a gathering of several thousand pastors and one of the great joys of my life was presenting to Dick Foth a lifetime achievement award in that congregation of pastors. And so I gave him the award, we sat down and we did a little bit of Q and A and I don't really remember what happened before or what happened after, but I'll never forget this moment. Foth takes the award and he says this is an award. Oh Man, I'm going to try to get through this. And he turns to me and he says this is the reward. I have been in a lot of rooms with a lot of people. I have never felt what I felt in that room and maybe because it was so personal to me, but I think everybody liked collectively caught their breath because they hadn't experienced a Fothism. Like, I'm even used to it. I'm like, what did you just say? I mean, he could've just dropped the mic and walked out. It's a moment I will treasure my entire life because I love Dick Foth like a father. That's what the kingdom is. It's about Elijah's anointing Elisha. It's about Dick Foth, I don't know. He believed in me more than I believed in myself. I know that for sure.

The way I think, the way I speak, the way I lead, I don't know so much of it is Foth, I don't know how to kind of draw the line between what's me and what's his impact on my life. But there's an osmosis that happens and it's more caught than taught, but I think it's a mindset. I think it's understanding that it's not about me. It's about anointing who's next? It's about growing fruit on other people's trees. It's about the legacy we leave in the people that we disciple, but I want you to hear this, your anointing does not belong to you and you have one. You have an anointing. I don't know where it is in its maturation process, and by the way, there are other anointings that God has for you. And the anointing, by the way, is the difference between the best you can do and the best God can do, but I want you to hear this. The anointing, your anointing does not belong to you. It's a gift from God and it's a gift for others. God anointed Elijah to anoint Elisha. God anointed Elijah to anoint Hazael and Jehu. It's how we seed the clouds.

Let me try to bring this to a close. This isn't just about Elijah recognizing potential in Elisha and anointing him. I think it's also about Elisha recognizing something in Elijah that was worth leaving 12 yoke of oxen and making a sacrifice and taking a risk and saying, I just need to be around that anointing. You've got to position yourself to be mentored and disciplined and it takes humility and it takes teachability. It takes the recognition, I do not have this thing figured out and I need some people in my life who can speak into my life. Now, I think there are a lot of ways that we try to do this at NCC. And, let me just say this, since we kicked off our summer, small groups. Listen, small groups are the way that we do discipleship, it's the way that we, iron sharpens iron. It's the way that we forged friendships and it's the way that we seed the clouds. We're seeding the clouds with these small groups. Can I just say I'm leading two groups this summer? One of them is ministry 101, and I'm gonna tell you why, because I have a sense that there are people across our seven campuses who feel a calling to full time vocational ministry, but you aren't sure how to take a step in that direction. I want to seed those clouds. I'm going to have some of our staff members share their unique journey into full time vocational ministry. I'll share some of my own experience, but I want to seed that cloud. Another group is called dare dream. And I believe that, in fact, I know we have got an incredible entrepreneurial spirit at this church. So many people with so many God ideas, but sometimes it's hard to figure out how that idea can become reality. And listen, we want to seed that entrepreneurial cloud because listen, I think the kingdom wants to advance in every sphere of society and that certainly includes business. Do we not need some more business as mission or mission, as business, you call it what you will. We need some people who were anointed in that business route to do and we've got a lot of them, but we need a few more of them. And that's true for every single sphere.

All right, let me close with this. Two weeks ago, I'm speaking at a conference in Chicago. A young man comes up to me afterwards, says, my name is Juan Martinez and your father in-law led me to faith in Christ. Everywhere I go, if I mentioned my father in-law, Bob Schmidgall, he died 20 years ago and whenever I mentioned his name, people come up to me and talk about the impact that he had in their lives. And so he says he led me to faith in Christ and then he says, and I went to Bible College and I got a scholarship and I knew where it was going because when he died a scholarship was created in his name for those who were pursuing full-time ministry, who needed some help and sure enough one got the Bob Schmidgall scholarship. And it's one of those moments where you realize that your legacy is not contained by a lifetime. That when you are leading people to faith in Christ, when you are mentoring in discipling, you don't die when you

die you continue to live on through the lives that you have impacted. I thought to myself, man, my father in-law is still seeding clouds twenty years later.

My niece Ella did a report on Eleanor Roosevelt this week, and so it jogged my memory that when the president died, Franklin D, Eleanor battled loneliness, it was a very dark time in her life. Doris Kearns Goodwin, phenomenal book, No Ordinary Time writes about this period of her life, and a friend gave her a verse of poetry that would become the constant source of encouragement the rest of her life. Here's what it said, "They are not dead who live in lives they leave behind: In those whom they have blessed they live a life again."

Now Elijah taken to heaven in a chariot, that's an exit. But he didn't leave did he? No, he stayed and he continued to perform miracles through the prophet that he had anointed. Let's seed the clouds with prayer. Let's seed the clouds with discipleship.

Let's pray.