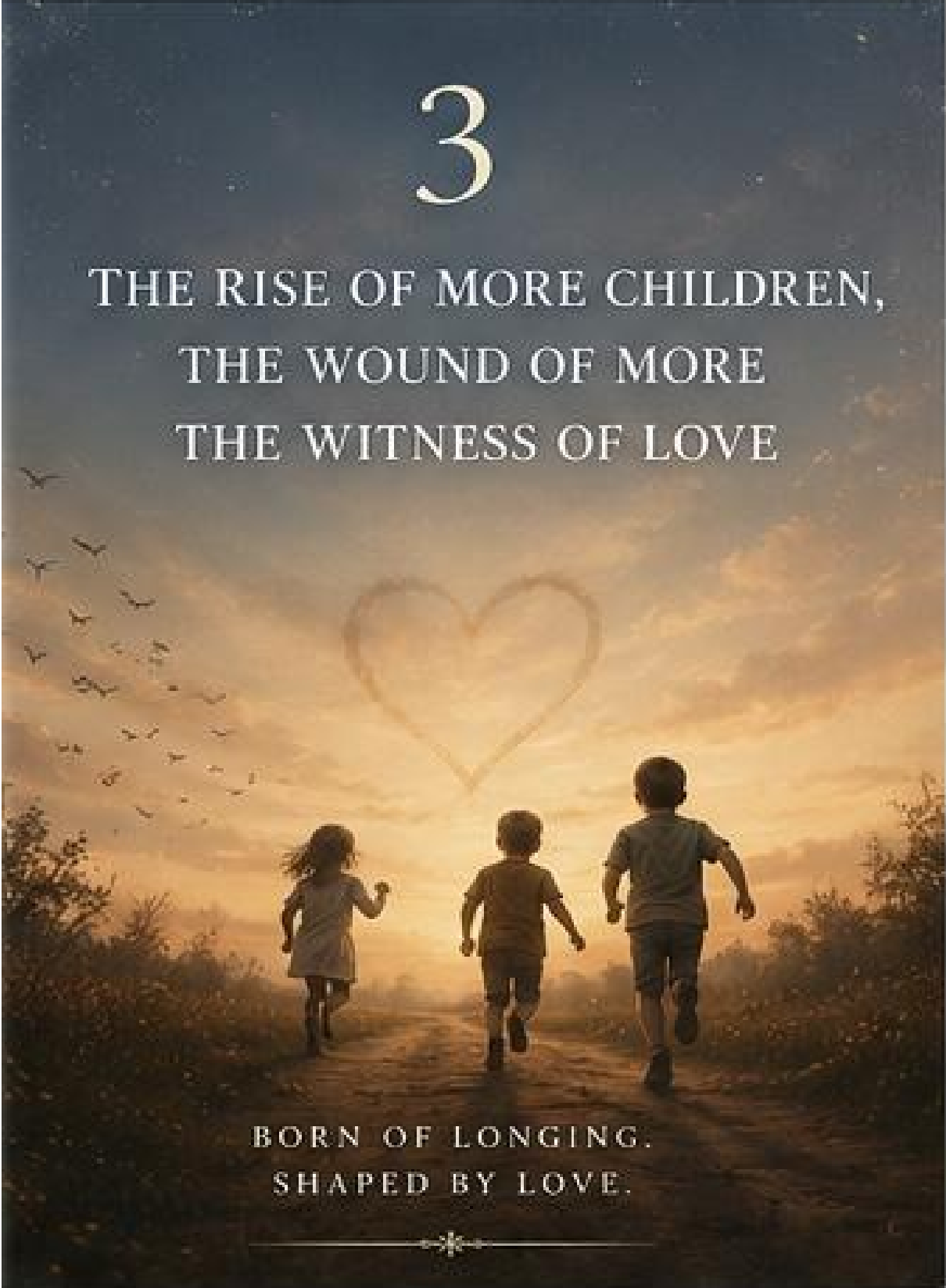




3

THE RISE OF MORE CHILDREN,
THE WOUND OF MORE
THE WITNESS OF LOVE

BORN OF LONGING.
SHAPED BY LOVE.

Part 3: The Rise of More Children

The Wound of More, the Witness of Love

More is beautiful, but more is costly. The world deeply needs these sacred echoes, these heavenly reflections, though oftentimes misunderstood, mislabeled or misdiagnosed. The emergence of these divine images of “more” ultimately reveal the mystery of life: we are birthed in and through weakness; we develop in vulnerability and trust; we are ultimately established by divine design to multiply an image, not of failure or dysfunction, but an image of our Creator, an image of victory through perseverance.

It wasn’t long ago I began to fully realize how often I had been told, implicitly or explicitly that my need for more was “too much,” that my longing made me unstable, insecure, alienated from God, even dangerous. You see, many hold to the mistaken understanding that their brand of religion is “the way”, forgetting that the “Way” was an incarnate demonstration of love, not a set of rules or dogmas to adhere to. I would soon discover, I wasn’t alone, there are countless others who were sidelined from the faith, whose only crime was to long for more. These overlooked creations weren’t problems to be fixed; they were sacred invitations to love deeper.

While managing an adolescent psychiatric community, I recognized this longing for more in those I served daily. It was in that environment of rehabilitation I was honored to be a participant, a presence, a witness, a familiar. I discovered countless children who longed for “more,” who grew up in less than adequate environments, whose developmental process had become stunted resulting in a failure to thrive, a failure of receiving “more”. This *failure to thrive* left behind indelible wounds and scars; I knew this familiar malady. I was familiar with their longing, not just because I worked there, but because I was them. Generations of my family were also victims of this failure to thrive, being starved of “more.” I looked into their eyes of those who had been admitted to this potential “place of healing” and I

recognized it: the emotional paralysis, the thirst for more, the ache to be seen, to be heard, to be held; the sacred cry for attention that wasn't performative, but eternal.

It's easy to overlook these "more" humans, to dismiss them as "needy," "manipulative," "just trying to get attention." But do you know what I say to that now? Yes, they do need attention, they're worth it, just like I was, just like you are. They were unmistakable, their eyes carried that same ache I'd known since I was small, that insatiable longing for love, for recognition, for someone to just see them and stay, not fix them, not label them, just **stay**. These children didn't know it, but they were my kindred. I recognized them not by diagnosis, not by behavior, but by a "more" heart. Some of them had been told they were "too much," others were simply ignored until their longing erupted in ways adults deemed inconvenient, or unacceptable. But I saw them, I knew them, I **was** them.

One such young man, who I'll call Leo, was sitting in a secure, locked down unit that I managed. Leo had a unique scar on his inner arm; the scar on Leo's inner forearm reflected raised letters: L-O-S-E-R. Leo had experienced a life of disappointments and setbacks and had chosen to take it out on himself by carving the letters LOSER into his forearm. On one day, Leo had chosen to *reopen his case against himself* by using a shard of hard plastic to re-accentuate his message. I asked Leo to give me the object he was attempting to assault himself with; Leo looked at me with apprehension and mistrust. It was in that moment I decided to take a gamble on Leo's resident "more" nature. I said to Leo, "Leo, do you trust me? Have I ever lied to you? If you'll trust me, give me that shard, I promise I'll give it back to you, upon one condition." My supervisor was watching the entire exchange, and I'm sure thought I had lost my mind. It was inconceivable that I would return to Leo anything to assist him to conspire against himself. Leo took the gamble; Leo trusted me and handed me the sharp item. I continued, "Leo, didn't you say earlier that you have a visit with your mom and 7-year-old little brother tonight at 6pm?" Leo's eyes lit up, "yes", he responded. I continued, "tell you what I'm going to do, I'll accompany you to your visit and give you two shards, one for you, and one for your little brother, and you can show him how to do that to himself." Leo's face immediately displayed remorse and pain and he, without

hesitation, responded, “oh, my God, NO,” Leo’s eyes filled with tears. I paused in the divine silence, and said, “Leo, you are an amazing young man. I can see your intense love for your little brother. There’s only one problem I see, why can’t you love yourself with that same kind of love?” Without giving him a chance to respond, I continued, “Leo, your little brother won’t do what you *say to do*, he, will do *what you do*. Your actions speak louder than your words; your brother will someday choose to follow your actions before he will ever follow your words”. That day, I watched, as Leo expressed his awareness, a revelation of love, a renewed respect for himself emerged, a love he had neglected to offer himself for years. Leo had a “more” heart but did not feel worthy to administer this love to himself, until he awakened to the knowledge of his self-destructive behavior and how it may influence his little brother’s future and well-being. Leo went on to successfully graduate the program, choosing to adopt a new reality of personal love and respect.

There is a dangerous tendency in our world to medicate or to pathologize the ones who hunger deeply. Please don’t misunderstand me, I’m not demonizing our medical community; I am grateful each day, as I witness countless healthcare professionals who faithfully serve others through proper diagnosis, treatment and administration of medicines to assist others in their journey towards wholistic health outcomes. In the medical practice there exists the very real need for practical care, warmth, kindness and intuitive logic. Addressing the needs of the hurting oftentimes is accompanied by people’s adverse reactions, resulting in flight, fight or freeze responses. Doctors, Nurses, Psychiatrists, Psychologists and Counselors play a vital role in the healing process of young minds and bodies. In the healing process, pain oftentimes emerges, physical, mental and/or emotional. During this *disruption of the familiar*, there comes a need for a consistent, tried and true pathways and methodologies for rehabilitation, no matter the negative responses reflected by the hurting individual(s). When people respond negatively, it’s not uncommon to mistakenly identify or label them as “needy”, “disruptive,” “overly sensitive”, “attention-seeking” and be sidetracked into thinking these triggered humans are unwilling to change. Rather than intuitively grasping they are too hurt to see, hear or receive help. What if their cries for attention are holy? What if their hunger and disruptive responses are a sacred signpost, not of

dysfunction, but of divine design? A place of restoration, renewal, reclamation.

You see, more-children, more-people don't want chaos, they want connection; they don't crave drama, they crave presence. They don't want to cause trouble, they want to be **loved enough** to be known, to be recognized and valued. The world often misunderstands the disenfranchised, but I choose not to, because I was one of them; I still am. I recall one such familiar story that occurred at a psychiatric hospital I managed: One evening I received a call from one of the staff who said, "Mr. Carlo, we have a young man discharging tonight, but he refuses to leave until he says goodbye to you." My more heart intuitively caught on fire, and when I picked up the phone, I heard the voice of a little boy who had found something holy in our connection. He said, "I'm going to miss you, Mr. Carlo." I responded I'd miss him too and reminded him of our sacred conversation. "Remember what I told you to say when someone accuses you of acting out just for attention?" And he repeated it, word for word: *"I do need attention. I'm WORTH the attention. And if someone doesn't think so, that's okay, because someone else will. Because I matter. Because I'm worth being loved."*

That's my boy, a more-child, a miracle, a sacred sprout just beginning to grow; a seedling breaking through the concrete. My only fear for this young man, and for all those in pursuit of their identity, is that someone would forget to water what was planted, or carelessly trample the fragile roots with ignorance, impatience or well-meaning platitudes; we must not allow for this to happen. We must remember: More-children, these sometimes-chaotic beings, are not problems to solve, they are sacred invitations to love deeper.

It breaks my heart how many of these more-gifts are mis-labeled using misguided, evocative language such as: "they're too much", "they're too loud," "too needy," "too sensitive," too dramatic," "too disruptive." What if we've been reading the signs all wrong? What if, what they need is not more medication or more restrictions, but more of us, more listening, more time, more patience, more belief, confidence and assurance in who they really are?

Over the years I've loved the trauma out of, and away from, these children, literally. I've loved the shame off their backs, the lies out of their lungs, the numbness out of their eyes. I've loved the despair out, showing despair the exit door. I've loved the self-hatred out, loved the lies out, and if I'm honest, in loving them, I was loving that part of me that was still waiting at the door, the part of me that never stopped wanting someone to notice, to stay, to say, "you matter this much." I encountered one such boy named Nathan, who had been placed in the hospital after his grandmother died resulting from Nathan's carelessness with matches that resulted in his grandmother's home being burned down. Unfortunately, grandma died in that fire. Nathan had practically grown up in the psychiatric hospital. Finding placement, a foster home, was difficult because when Nathan was triggered, he would become volatile, aggressive, physical.

Years into Nathan's stay, Nathan was now 17 years old and had grown from a little boy in stature, to a tall, muscular young man who could be rather menacing. Nathan could be intimidating, when Nathan would trigger, it would take several adults to physically restrain him. I had recently joined the team and was attempting to model to employees the ability to deescalate without putting our hands on the children. On this day, little did I know, I would have the privilege to model de-escalation first-hand. I could hear from a distance a loud banging, upon arrival to the unit, I witnessed the steel door attached to the safe-room slam closed for the last time that day. The safe-room was a place where children would enter when feeling unsafe or angry. Nathan had entered, feeling angry, Nathan slammed the door repeatedly, causing the door to fall, detaching from the door frame, destroying its hinges. As I approached the doorway and looked in, I was rather impressed that someone could slam a door off its hinges; looking down at the door I failed to see Nathan physically charge me. Nathan punched me in the face and chest, causing my glasses to fall off my face. I stepped back, picked up my glasses and returned them to my face and requested that the team stand back and give Nathan room. I continued and said to Nathan, "are you ok?" The comment "are you ok?" and the request to "stand off" to the security team created a bewildered look on Nathan's face. He growled and began to back into the room, confused that he was not immediately put into a physical hold. Nathan backed up, returning into

the safe-room, though the door was laying on the floor. I apologized to Nathan, stating, "I apologize Nathan, I should have given you some space." Nathan continued his bewildered gaze. I continued, "Nathan, I'm going to give you the space you need, I will return and maybe we can talk later? We posted several trained employees outside of the safe room. The safe-room was no longer quite safe, now without a door. Nathan waited. It was 20-30 minutes later I approached Nathan's open-door confinement, Nathan looked up at me, with a shame reflected in his eyes, and said, "I'm sorry Mr. Carlo." I responded, "I forgive you Nathan." I deliberately choose not to say, "that's alright Nathan," because it wasn't, Nathan's action's caused harm, but that could be addressed later, but instead I chose to say, "I forgive you Nathan." Nathan's body language softened, I asked Nathan to look up at me, because shame and failure had robbed him of his confidence. I continued, "I forgive you Nathan, I should have given you space; that's my failure. Nathan, I will work on that in the future. What can I do to assist you in the future so that when you are triggered, we can avoid another such incident?" Nathan and I worked on a safety plan, a step-by-step approach to assist him to deescalate and to find practical ways to find help and to be safe. Before I share some of those simple steps, I'd like to fast forward to Nathan's discharge.

Yes, Nathan eventually discharged, almost two years later I received a page over the intercom, "Mr. Carlo, someone is at the front desk and would like to see you." It was Nathan, I was surprised that he asked for me, I hadn't known Nathan long, many of the staff practically grew up with him, but I had only known Nathan a very short time. Why me? What did Nathan remember the most? Nathan remembered, "I forgive you". Nathan remembered the refusal to meet aggression with aggression. Nathan remembered that someone was willing to take the hit and model a response of love, of patience, kindness and self-control. Love would crush Nathan's anger, soften his heart and offer him a future. Nathan went on to tell me he was enrolled in a community college, had a job and was driving a car, and Nathan pointed to the car and to his girlfriend waiting in the front seat. That day, I was reminded of more; Nathan needed more; more would cost someone something, but freedom would be the result.

Later that day I shared with Jason 5 simple principles to put himself F.I.R.S.T.:

F = FORGIVE: Yourself, God, *if you believe in God*, and lastly, Others

- Determine *who* or *what's* hurt you? (name them one by one)
- What boundaries have been crossed/violated?
- What boundaries need to be reinforced or established?
- What boundaries have I not maintained? (guilt-free-zone)

I = IDENTITY: Know who you are.

- Ask, what motivates me? What are my likes and dislikes?
- What are my strength and qualities?
- Who or what has contributed to your stinking-thinking?
- Determine to replace negative or self-debasing thoughts with positive affirmations.
- Ask, what do I value? What are my beliefs?

R = RESPONSIBILITY: Own your actions.

- Willingly ask, "what worked?"; "what can I do differently?"
- Face your failures with honesty and grace; refuse to minimize, rationalize and justify your negative behavior.
- Be intentional: ask, "What if I refuse to act?"
- Remember yourself: denial, shame, blame, excuses only prolong the pain.
- Practice grounding techniques by identifying:
 - o 5 things I can see around me
 - o 4 things I can touch around me.
 - o 3 things I can hear around me.
 - o 2 things I can smell.
 - o 1 thing I can taste.

S = SUPPORT: Seek Healthy Relationships

- What are my coping skills: those things that help me manage stress?
- Who are those who can help? List them.

- List those I should avoid, and why?
- Consider: Yoga, Bicycling, reading, exercise, walking, support groups.

T = TRANSITION: Plan for Your Future.

- Write it down, what are my goals?
 - o **Specific:** (describe your goal)
 - o **Measurable:** (how can I track my progress?)
 - o **Achievable:** (who can help me reach my goal?)
 - o **Relevant:** (Is this goal relevant to my wishes, dream, desires?)
 - o **Time-based:** (set short, mid, and long-range check-in times/dates)
 - o

**** I have written an entire workbook dedicated to this subject entitled: "Lifecare FIRST", it is available in PDF free to all those who request.*

You can recognize a "more" child if you slow down long enough, to see past the behavior. These "more" creations carry a fire in their eyes, an ache for connection. I used to resent that fire of "more" in myself, I tried to extinguish it; I tried to fit in; I tried to pretend I was okay with less. But I'm done apologizing, I'm done shrinking, I will embrace the more in me.

And if you're reading this, and feel this familiar longing for more, hear me clearly: You are not too much, the world desperately needs you. You are not a problem to be fixed; you are a soul to be honored, to be revered.

More-people teach us; more-people remind us, more-people call us back to our own hunger, to the part of us we buried under efficiency, under adulthood, under fear.

To be a "more-person" is to be a torchbearer, a champion, an advocate: to feel too much, love too deep, ache too long, and still rise. Be assured of this: *when* "more" children are loved consistently, tenderly, they become more-women, more-men: healers, prophets, truth-tellers, lovers of the least and the last.

When you see a child misbehaving, do you ask, “What’s wrong with you?” Instead, ask, “What happened to you, baby?” because, behind every explosive behavior is an unmet need, a sacred cry, a flicker of more.

To the more child in all of us:

You are not too much; you are not too late.

You are not alone; you are the echo of Eden.

You are the whisper of what’s next, and the world waits for your light.

Reader Reflection:

Was there ever a time I was labeled “too much” or “too emotional”?

How did those words shape me?

What images, words or experience echo in your mind, attempting to discredit you? What steps are you taking to address that destructive false narrative.

What might it look like to reclaim my sacred sensitivity?

Are there any principles in F.I.R.S.T. that resonate with your inner child?