

# When God Calls Kids

Helping Kids Discern and Grow in Their  
Callings

Dr. Jesse Joyner, PhD  
Dean of Children and Family Ministries  
Ascent College





The image features a vibrant watercolor background with soft, blended colors of orange, yellow, green, and blue. A large, bright red cloud-like shape is centered on the page, containing the text. The text is arranged in three lines: 'Jesse' in white, 'Joyner' in white, and 'Juggling' in yellow. All text is in a bold, rounded, sans-serif font.

**Jesse**

**Joyner**

**Juggling**



PDFs of my notes and this Power Point!



# When God Calls Kids:

Helping Kids Discern and  
Grow in Their Callings

Jesse Joyner, PhD  
Dean of Children and Family  
Ministries  
Ascent College



*The Calling of Samuel*, Gustave Dore, 1877,  
The Art Institute of Chicago



Three colorful balls, possibly made of leather or a similar material, are arranged on a blue textured surface. The balls are divided into sections of red, yellow, green, and blue. One ball in the foreground is primarily red and blue, while the two balls behind it are more evenly divided among all four colors.

**From  
Phoenixville  
to Bethlehem**



# Your Calling Story

## Find a Partner and...

1. Share about an adult who played an impactful role in your life when you were a child. What was it about their approach to relating to you that made it an impactful relationship?
2. How and when were you called to your current vocation? When you think back to your childhood, do you see any whispers of your calling in your childhood years? What did that look like?



# What are callings?

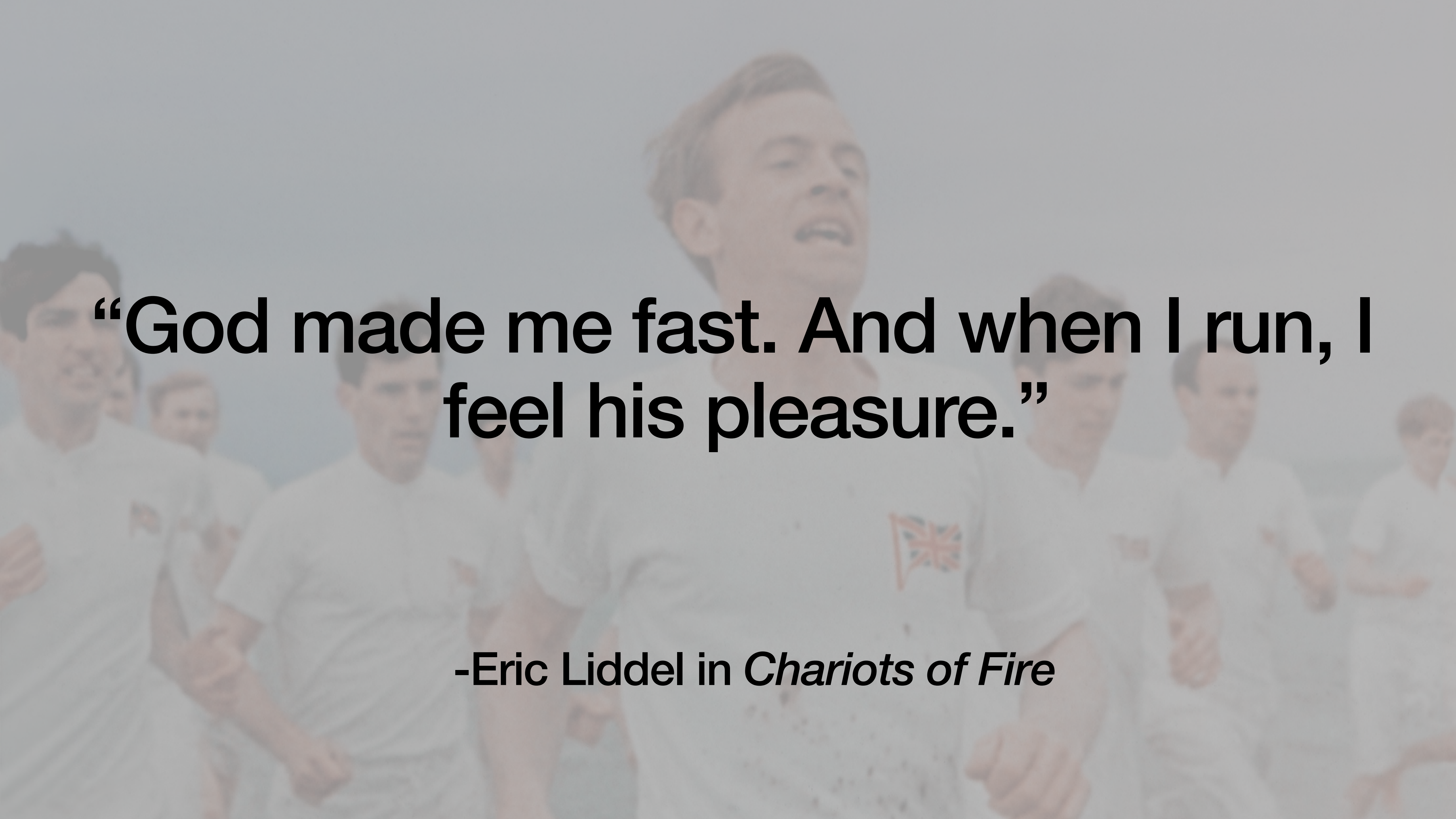
1. General calling - Ultimately, calling for Christians is to “wholly belong to Jesus Christ” (Bonhoeffer)
2. Specific callings - The unique roles and places God calls us to, often related to our specific giftings and talents



“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

-Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (1973)





**“God made me fast. And when I run, I  
feel his pleasure.”**

**-Eric Liddel in *Chariots of Fire***



A person in a white long-sleeved shirt and blue pants is performing a handstand in a room. The room has a wooden floor, a white wall, and a window with a view of a building. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The text is centered over the person's torso.

“calling is a pathway through which we can express our gifts for the common good, and for God’s glory.”

-Bryan Dik, *Redeeming Work* (2020)



**Can kids  
be called?**





# Of course!

1. “Then the Lord called Samuel” (1 Samuel 3:4)
2. “Before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5)
3. “You will conceive and give birth to a son...” (Luke 1:31)
4. “Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name” (Isaiah 49:1)



Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

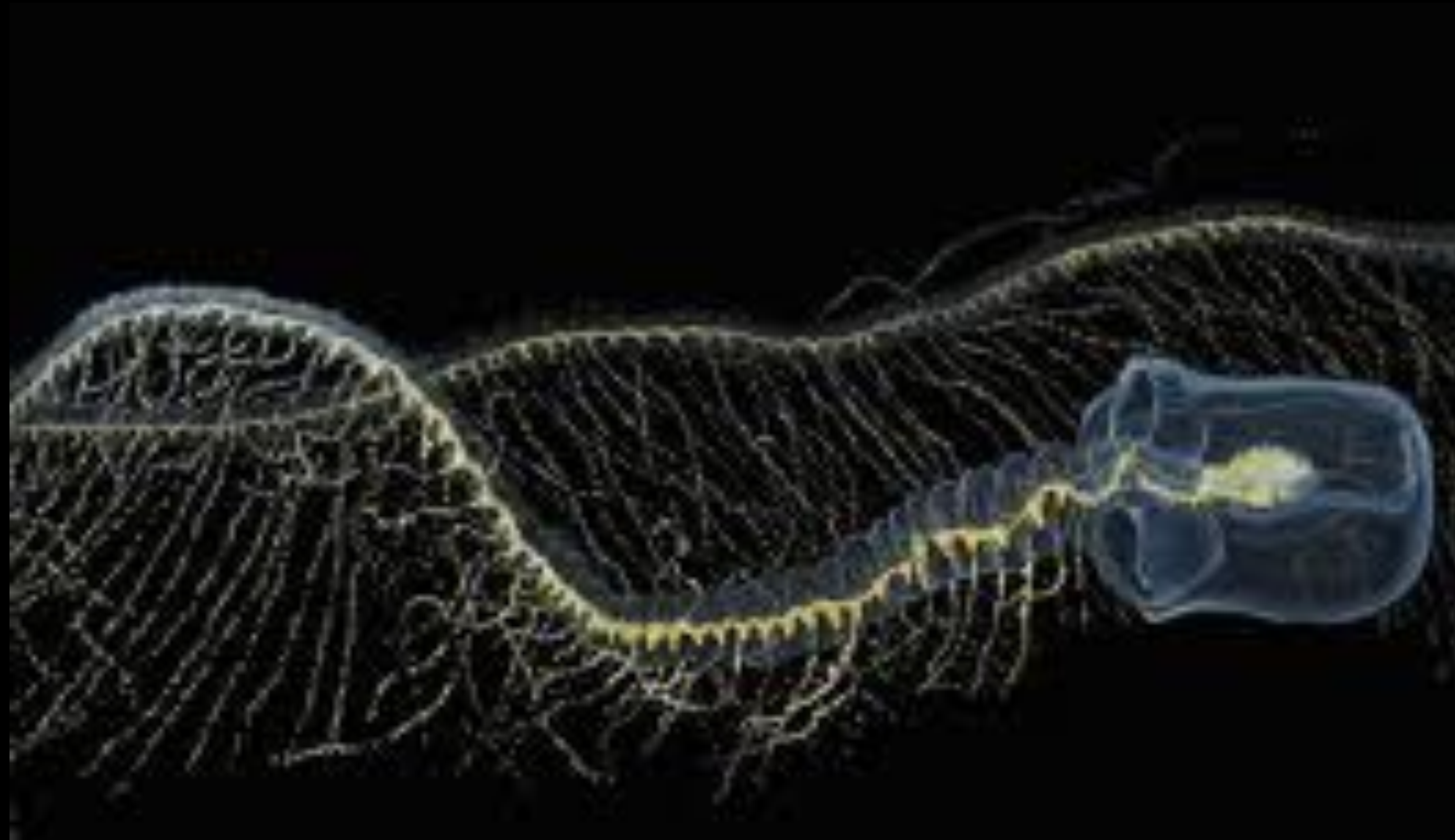


# Nestor

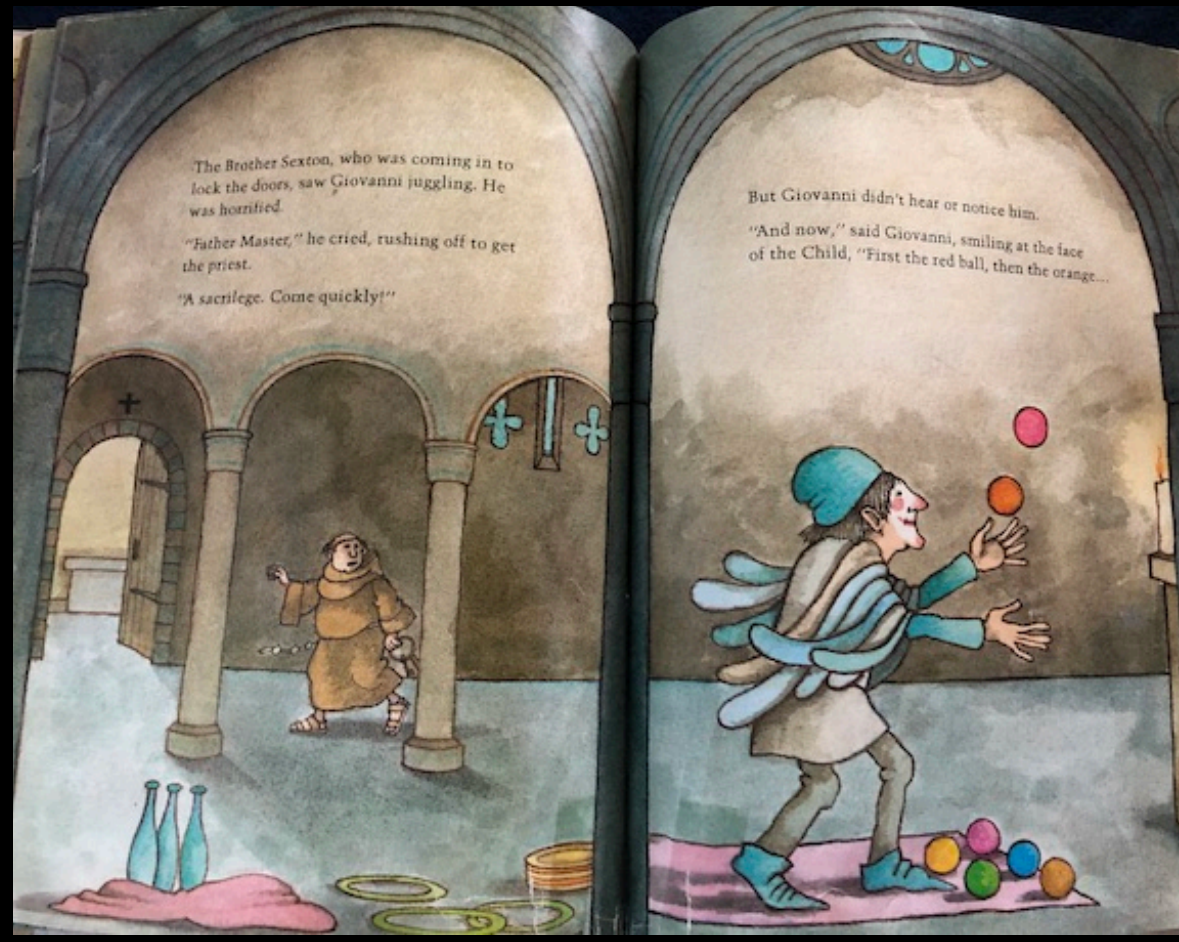




# Siphonophore









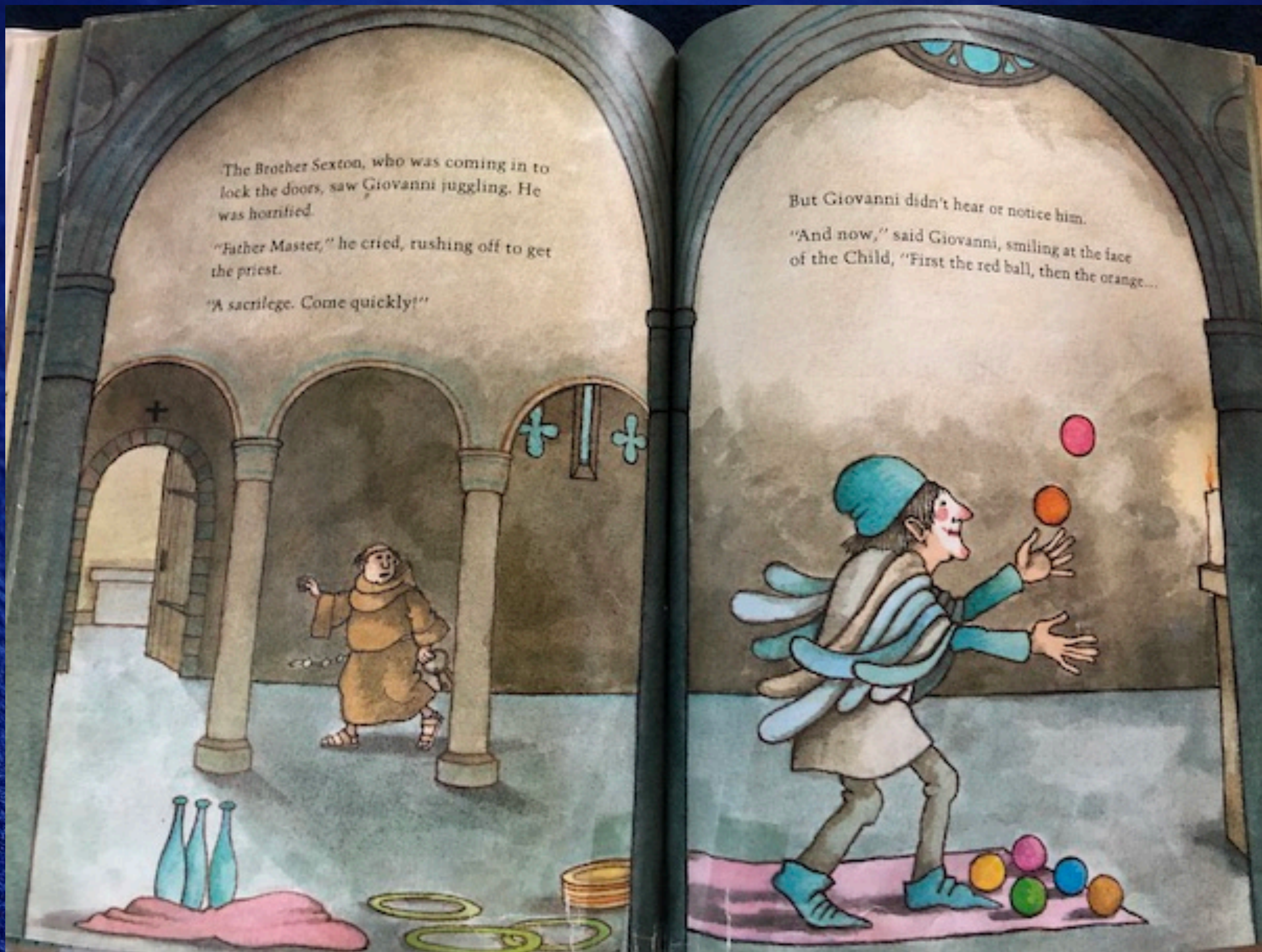
The Brother Sexton, who was coming in to lock the doors, saw Giovanni juggling. He was horrified.

"Father Master," he cried, rushing off to get the priest.

"A sacrilege. Come quickly!"

But Giovanni didn't hear or notice him.

"And now," said Giovanni, smiling at the face of the Child, "First the red ball, then the orange..."



From  
*The Clown of God*  
by Tomie dePaola



# HOLY FOOLS

THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIVED CALLING  
FOR CHRISTIAN VARIETY PERFORMERS

JESSE JOYNER

NOVEMBER 2021



*Juggling the Middle Ages*

Stained glass by Jeffrey Miller

in collaboration with Sarah Navasse and Jeremy Bourdois (c. 2018)



# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of a lived calling for Christian variety performers.

A basic qualitative study method was employed to conduct hour-long semi-structured interviews with thirty seasoned variety performers (jugglers, magicians, ventriloquists, clowns, and other similar entertainers) who ascribe to the Christian faith and claim to live out a life calling through their vocations. All participants are based in North America except for one who is based in England.

The findings were evaluated through a theoretical framework of theology, vocational meaning-making, and socio-cultural learning theory. Prior research has shown that a calling-oriented approach to one's work can lead to deep levels of satisfaction, meaning, and engagement in one's work (Duffy et al. 2018, 423). But research has also unearthed what are known as "dark sides" to calling (Duffy and Dik 2013, 433).

This study found both positive and negative experiences related to living out one's calling as well.

RIGHT: *FIRE EATER* BY EDWARD KNIPPERS, 2009





# MAJOR THEMES

## FOR THE PARTICIPANTS OF THIS STUDY...

**Journey** - A lived calling is a dynamic, ongoing experience that can shift and change over time, sometimes involving multiple callings at once (Dik 2020).

**Joy** - A lived calling involves internal joy and satisfaction in one's own work according to their giftings, which is in turn shared to bring joy to others in the world.

**Community** - A lived calling is discovered, discerned, and expressed in, with, and for community, which serves as a manifold vocational support system leading to valorization and a reinforced sense of calling for the individual (Cahalan and Miller-McLemore 2017; Medeiros et al. 2018; Hall and Chandler 2005).

**Oblation** - A lived calling for the Christian is one that is wholly submitted as a sacrificial offering unto the Lord Jesus Christ (Maslow 1967).



THE JUGGLER BY MICHAEL PARKES, 1981



# SUB-THEMES

## Theme 1 - Journey

**Calling Journey** - The called variety performer is on a journey of discernment as they live out their calling (Dik 2020).

**Gifting of the Artist** - The called variety performer understands calling in terms of their God-given gifts and how those gifts can serve the world around them (Rom 12:6-8).

## Theme 2 - Joy

**Internal Pleasure** - The called variety performer senses the joy of the Lord inside them in their work, which gives them internal joy as well (Hudson 1981).

**Make Their Day Fantastic** - The called variety performer understands their calling as something to share with the world, filling needs that their art can fill, and bringing the “fantastic” to others’ days (Buechner 1993).

## Theme 3 - Community

**Vocational Support System** - The called variety performer is situated in a constellation of vocational support, filled with encouragements and affirmations in their calling.

**These Jugglers are Not from God** - The called variety performer experiences darkness in their calling, sometimes in the form of religious antagonism, other times as physical or mental challenges. They overcome through valorization and the affirmations of their vocational support system (Medeiros et al. 2018; Hall and Chandler 2005).

**Nurture the Called Community** - The called variety performer serves their vocational community through leadership, teaching, mentoring, and further developing the field of their craft (Sayers 1974).

## Theme 4 - Oblation

**Surrender it All to God** - The called variety performer devotes their entire calling and selves unto their Lord Jesus Christ, like a sacrificial offering upon the altar (Maslow 1967).

\*See page 187 for interplay of themes.

RIGHT: *THE JUGGLER OF NOTRE DAME* BY GLYN WARREN PHILPOT, 1928





# SURPRISING FINDINGS

Living out calling *through* struggle, not apart from it.

Too much higher education?

Biblical narrative as gateway for vocational meaning-making.

The role of money - it's not the main thing, but it's still a thing.

The "Evan effect."

Unsolicited visual displays of art.

That *Chariots of Fire* quote.



UNKNOWN TITLE BY DARIO FO (B. 1926)



The background is a watercolor-style wash of colors, including shades of orange, yellow, green, and blue. A large, red, cloud-like shape is centered on the page, containing the text. The text is arranged in three lines: 'Jesse' in white, 'Joyner' in white, and 'Juggling' in yellow.

**Jesse**

**Joyner**

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