

Huh?
Week 1 Devotionals
By: Kevin Bobrow

Day 1

Comfortable with Questions

It seems that wanting to know the answers to all the questions of life is a fairly universal desire. Inherent in each of us seems to be the idea that once we know all the answers and understand everything, then we will feel at ease, as if everything is okay. However, Jesus was not in the habit of offering answers as much as he was in the habit of asking questions. He seemed to push people toward questions instead of answers.

He was certainly comfortable with questions. He asked lots of them, and he really enjoyed responding to questions with more questions, especially to religious leaders who had an agenda. It seems that most of us are very uncomfortable with uncertainty, though. We don't like to live with our questions, to wrestle with our questions, to sit with our questions. We want answers! We want to *know*. Know why. Know how. Know who. Know when. We want to know everything. And if there are questions we don't know the answer to, or problems we can't fix, we generally will do everything in our power to find the answers or fix the problems. And sometimes Jesus just wants us to stop...

To pause, and sit with our questions.

What is a question you are uncomfortable "sitting with"?

What is a question you have wrestled to find an answer to?

When it seems you simply cannot know the answer, what emotions does that produce in you?

When a hard question presents itself, such as why someone died prematurely or why someone had to endure injustice at the hand of another, the emotions that come up in me include fear, doubt, and anger. I can become fearful because the question represents a piece of life I simply do not understand, and I realize how little control I have over my life and over the world I live in. I have doubt at times because I see all the evil and injustice around me, and I wonder if a good God really is in control of all of this. I wonder why he seems to heal some, and save some, but not others. And at times I get angry because the injustices suffered by some just seem unfair, especially those who suffer at the hand of another. Why should someone suffer or be abused or be killed merely because another makes the choice to hurt others?

I have come to think that such wrestling with hard questions, and experiencing the normal emotions that are attached to those questions, is much of what God has for us. I think precisely what he **does not** want is for us to brush them aside and try to ignore hard questions. Or, worse, to pretend to have it all figured out and to not be bothered by any of the questions of life.

It seems to me that many of the questions Jesus received were asked in order to pin down answers to hard questions, to remove the uncertainty that all of us who are humans must deal with on some level. The questioners wanted Jesus to take away the hard questions and make things easy, sort of like students who do not really want to learn from the teacher but only want to know what will be on the test so they can get a good grade. But Jesus didn't really seem interested in having a bunch of followers who could spew out a wealth of organized, categorized knowledge that made all the questions of life easy to understand. *He seemed to want his followers to struggle with issues, and to deal with the emotions that are attached to such a struggle, so they could be deeper, wiser, and humbler.*

We see Jesus avoid taking away the uncertainty related to a difficult issue in Luke 10:25. It says, "On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"

So here is a difficult question, one most people struggle with at some point. Some struggle with the question of whether there is life after death, others struggle with what that life might look like, and still others struggle with how to get there. Here the expert in the law is trying to take away the ambiguity associated with how to get eternal life. How do I secure it, he asks. It would have been easy for Jesus simply to give him the answer, to tell him what he must do to gain eternal life. But instead he replied with another question, pushing the man to think deeply and perhaps even to consider why he was asking the question.

Verse 26 says, "*What is written in the Law?*" he replied. *'How do you read it?'*"

Jesus has no interest in solving this mystery for the expert in the law. He wants him to continue to wrestle. At the end of the story Jesus tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan, so the expert in the law can really think about what it means when the law says to love your neighbor as yourself. Much of what God wants for us is to continue to wrestle, to ponder, and to live in the midst of the questions.

Why do you think God desires us to wrestle with difficult questions? What good can come from such uncertainty and the emotions it brings?

What could be the downside of a bunch of followers who have it all figured out, who have no remaining questions about life?

What questions do you think you have been brushing aside that God wants you to "take back off the shelf" and struggle with?

Take a moment and be silent before God. Ask God what difficult questions you have been avoiding that

God might want you to deal with, and then just listen. See what he brings to your mind and heart.

Day 2

“What are you looking for?”

What a great question. What *are* you looking for? It seems like so many of us, even those of us who outwardly appear to have it all together, are inwardly roaming from one thing to the next, trying to find exactly what it is we are looking for. We often know we are searching, but just as often we don't know for what!

Perhaps this is true for you when it comes to work. You have an established job and may even be quite successful, but it just doesn't seem like *this* is what you will do for the rest of your working life. Or that *this* is what God made you to do. Or perhaps you sense this perpetual seeking in your relationships, and you seem to jump from one relationship to another because you never seem to find that perfect friend or significant other—it always seems clear that there *must* be someone better you could be spending your time and energy on. Or perhaps you sense it in your spiritual life. You get restless, wanting more clarity or understanding or assurance that what you believe *really is* the truth. You keep seeking, even if subconsciously, for that book or sermon that will explain it all and take away your longing and uncertainty.

The truth is that all of us are looking for something, and this has been true of humans forever. It seems it is somehow wired into our DNA to be restless, to search for something that will truly fulfill us.

Jesus asks this exact question in John 1, in a fascinating scene. Read John 1:19-37.

John the Baptist was baptizing people, testifying to the people that he was *not* the Christ but was preparing the way for the Christ. As large crowds came to him to receive a baptism of repentance, we are told in verse 29 that he saw Jesus coming toward him and exclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” The next day John was there again, and two of his own disciples were standing with him. He saw Jesus pass by again and said for a second time, “Look, the Lamb of God!” Verse 37 tells us that these two disciples, when they heard John's exclamation, immediately started following Jesus. Let's pause here in the story.

In the Israelite culture of this time, it was common for expert teachers in the law or authoritative religious leaders to have disciples, young men who would literally follow them wherever they went, listening to every word and watching every action. They did this in order to learn from them and hopefully become like them. So these disciples of John had started following him because they saw something authoritative in him, something special, and they wanted to learn from him and become like him. But when their teacher exclaimed that he was in the presence of someone greater, the very Lamb of God, these disciples jumped at the chance to follow this man. We are told one of these men was Andrew, Peter's brother, who brought Peter to Jesus shortly after. This Andrew became one of the twelve and followed Jesus for the next three years...and beyond.

That's the back story. But let's return to the passage. These men instantly left John and began following Jesus, and in verse 38 Jesus turned around and asked them, "*What are you looking for?*" Some versions translate this as "What do you want?", but the verb here (zhete/w) has more of a connotation of seeking or searching. Jesus is asking them what they are searching for...

Have you ever sensed Jesus asking you the same question? Have you ever sensed God asking you, in the midst of your frantic life, to stop and consider what you are looking for? I certainly have. It seems that often I keep myself so busy precisely so I don't have to stop and think about what it is I'm doing. *And the reason this is so sad, the reason I think God consistently calls us to stop and consider what we're doing, is because life is so short. And we only get one shot to live it, and do what we were made to do. And be who we were made to be.*

These disciples who left John's side to follow after Jesus were certainly not squandering their shot. They were chasing after meaning, and life, and truth, and hope. They were chasing after the Savior of the world. And they realized pretty quickly that their search for all of these things was over, and that they would be following Jesus for the rest of their lives.

Be silent before God for a couple minutes, pondering Jesus' question as if it was directed to you: *What are you looking for? What is it you are truly searching for?*

As you sit and ponder, ask God to show you how you have been trying to find what you are looking for.

Ask God to show you the right ways to find what you are looking for...

Day 3

Finding What We're Looking For

U2's famous song "Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" has given words to the feelings of many regarding their search for meaning. At its high point, the song's lyrics say:

*You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains
Carried the cross of my shame, of my shame
You know I believed it*

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

For many Christians these words were offensive, as if Bono, the lead singer, were making a statement about how even Christ left him empty. But I don't think this is what Bono was saying. I think he was talking about the perpetual search for meaning, for truth, and for fulfillment. And even though he believed in Christ, and knew the truth about him, his thirst for meaning had not been quenched. He still found himself longing...

Have you ever felt this way, that even though you knew the truth—the glorious news that Jesus had died for you and loves you—you were still searching?

Why do you think this feeling of incompleteness comes even to those who know what life is about and where hope is found?

Augustine was a Christian leader in the early church, a bishop in the town of Hippo who was extremely intelligent and insightful. His writings made a big impact on later Christian theologians and on the church as a whole. In one of his most widely read works called *Confessions*, he wrote a line that has become very famous: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord.”

I think this is what was going on with Bono, and with so many of us who know the truth about God and believe in God but do not truly *know* him. We do not rest in him.

Is your walk with Christ often characterized more by what you *know about* him than by *time spent with* him? If so, what bearing do you think this fact might have on your feelings of incompleteness, or a lack of fulfillment, or a continual yearning for more?

Part of the beauty of that U2 song, to me, is that Bono didn't give up the search. The lyrics push him onward, despite his feelings, to continue searching. He is continuing to look for meaning, instead of deciding there *is* no meaning and giving up.

Much of what God wants from us, in the midst of our loneliness, emptiness, lack of fulfillment, and restlessness, is for us to continue to search. *For we learn much of what God wants to teach us when we come to the end of our rope, to the end of what we know, to the end of trying on our own, and we admit we just don't understand. We admit that we need help. This is a position of openness, of humility, and of seeking help. And it is when we are open and humble that God can best work in our life, filling our emptiness and fulfilling our longing.* When we want to categorize God and put him in a box in our head so we can have

life all figured out, it doesn't work too well. But when we admit we don't know and continue searching with open hearts, God is able to come in and fulfill our longing.

When it comes down to it, even though we can find rest when we rest in God, we will not fully understand until we are with God, when we see him face to face. Until then we must continue trusting and searching with open hearts. Paul expresses this beautifully in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Ask God to help you continue searching, even when it is easier to give up the search.

Ask God to help you continue trusting, even though for now all we can see is a poor reflection of the truth.

Ask God to help you never forget that knowledge about him will never fulfill your longing—only a relationship with him will.

Spend some time listening to whatever God might want to say to you...

Day 4

Asking for Help

As a parent of two young girls who are constantly finding something to cry (or scream) about, I am daily instructing them to **calm down and use their words**. Do you think God ever feels like telling us to calm down and use our words??

Do you think he wants to tell us to stop getting so upset about the circumstances of our lives, and to stop trying to immediately fix whatever is going wrong on our own?

I think he wants to tell us all of these things, all the time... We are so quick to freak out about whatever problems confront us, instead of taking them in stride and realizing how small they are. We are so quick to busy ourselves trying to instantly solve whatever problem might be confronting us, because we want the least possible amount of pain or inconvenience in our lives. Frankly, we want our lives to be easy.

And often in our frantic attempt to take away the problems confronting us, we never use our words. We rarely think through the issue, recognize the problem confronting us, and express what we need. We even more rarely ask for help! We are so busy fretting or fixing that we do not use our words and ask for help.

Let me give you an example that I can then relate back to us. My oldest daughter, the other day, was playing with PlayDoh and wanted to use a new color. She tried to open the container, then she *really* tried, and then she yanked with all her might while she screamed at the top of her lungs. If I hadn't stopped her she would have kept that up for several minutes. Picture that (incredibly cute) little child trying to pry open a PlayDoh container and screaming her head off because she could not do it, while her (quite strong) father stood by, willing and able to help.

That picture is a picture of us. We are the screaming child so often, and God is standing there, willing and able to help, and certainly strong enough to handle any of our issues. Yet so often we simply don't stop, use our words, and ask for help.

What problem are you facing right now that you need to stop fretting about and simply ask God for help?

If something comes to mind, take a few minutes and do it! Use your words and ask God for help...

In Mark 10 we see someone who needs help cry out for help to Jesus. Verses 46-48 say, "Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

This man had several serious problems. His most pressing problem was probably that he was hungry, but certainly his blindness was the largest root problem, which kept him from working and living a normal life. When he hears that Jesus is there, he just starts shouting for help and will not stop. He knows he needs help, he is done trying to solve his own problems, and he very clearly asks for help from the only person he believed could help. I have a feeling Jesus very much appreciated this man's persistence and faith.

Verses 49-51 say, "Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him.

Another great question from Jesus. Again, he knew the man's thoughts and knew what he wanted. And even if he didn't, he probably could have guessed what he wanted! But the man asked for mercy, and Jesus wants him to state exactly what he wants. He wants the man to use his words and ask for help.

"The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.' 'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

Rabbi, I want to see. I imagine a pause before these words. I picture this man being taken aback by the question, and pondering for a moment how to respond. What did he really want Jesus to do for him? Perhaps he had been thinking of his immediate needs and had not yet thought of what he truly wanted. Now the question had been posed to him by one who could do anything, and he spoke clearly of his greatest desire: I want to see.

If Jesus asked you this question, in the midst of whatever your struggles and problems are, what would you say? What is it you *really* want? Have you figured that out? If so, have you told God what you want or need? Have you asked for help?

Jesus wanted the man to recognize his need, say out loud that he wanted healing, and ask for help. When he did, Jesus instantly healed him. How often would God intervene in our lives if we merely asked? Whatever your deepest needs are, are you willing to recognize your need, tell God what you need, and ask for help?

Spend some time pondering Jesus' question: what do you want me to do for you? What is it you really want?

When you find your deepest longings and desires welling up in you, express those to God, asking him to fill you and meet your longings, even if you can't have exactly what you desire.

Admit that you have often tried to fix everything yourself instead of asking for help. Ask for the strength to be humble, for the courage to seek help.

Day 5

Freedom in Submission

There are times when I am irritable and have no idea why. I am just not feeling happy. I don't want to play with my kids, I don't want to sit on the couch, I don't want to work, I don't want to go outside... I really have no desire to do anything and I'm just very irritable. Usually when I feel this way, there is one very clear reason why, and even though the same problem is at the root of my irritability every time, I never remember in the moment how to solve the problem.

The reason why I'm irritable? I'm exhausted. My body is fighting with all its might to tell me to stop, and rest, and take a nap. Or go to sleep for the night. Yet I fight against it even harder, because, well, I would rather be awake and irritable than give in and go to sleep.

I have no idea why I do this; perhaps I'm just strange. But this tendency to avoid at all costs the one straightforward thing we need is, in my opinion, very common.

As we talked about earlier in the week, it seems there is wired into each of us a desire to search, to find meaning. And often even when we know the right things and believe the right things, we still feel empty and continue to wander around searching for what will fulfill us.

Just like I only stop being irritable when I stop fighting and submit to the sleep my body needs, our searching souls will only find what they are looking for when we stop restlessly trying to do everything on our own and submit to a relationship with God. It is simply not enough to know a list of beliefs about God. It is simply not enough to do all the things Christians do (and not do all the things they aren't supposed to do). *Being a Christian is about following Christ, and since Christ is a person and not a set of doctrines, the core of our faith is about a relationship, not beliefs.*

You will never find freedom from your longing and your constant search by trying harder. You will only find freedom through submission—through giving up on fixing your problems and finding meaning on your own, and submitting to the relationship with God your soul longs for (like a body longs for sleep).

Have you found yourself fighting against the very thing you really need?

Why do you think we have such a hard time submitting? Why do you think we sometimes run from a relationship with God by keeping ourselves too busy and by distracting ourselves with meaningless things?

I encourage you to run toward a relationship with God, to seek after him when you feel like you need to search for meaning. We make progress in our search for fulfillment not when we figure everything out, or gain some great new insight. We make progress when our search leads us to humility before God, to an understanding of how little we know, to our Savior. When we stop trying and striving to solve everything on our own, we can humbly ask God for help and submit to a relationship with him. Then, even though we don't know everything we'd like to know, and even though all of our problems aren't fixed, our longing is quenched. As we are in the presence of the one who made us and loves us and has a plan for us, our thirst is satisfied.

Spend some time with God. Tell him what you want. Tell him what you need. Tell him where there is dissatisfaction in your life, and longing you want him to fill. Apologize for keeping yourself busy and distracted instead of submitting to a relationship with him. Listen to what Jesus most wants to say to you, or to the question he is asking you...

Huh? Week 1

Small Group Discussion

This week we are discussing the search for meaning, and how we are wired from birth to search for fulfillment and meaning. Discuss these questions as a group:

- Describe a time in your life when you were “searching”. What would you say you were searching for?
- Do you find yourself longing for something more in the midst of your everyday life? Where do you think this longing comes from?
- Do you think people who are Christians are still searching, whether for meaning or fulfillment or purpose? Why or why not?

Read Mark 10:46-52 out loud together, paying attention to the question Jesus asks.

- Why do you think Jesus asked the man “What do you want me to do for you?”, since he probably already knew the answer?
- If you stood before Jesus and he asked you that same question, what would your answer be?

In your soul, what is it that you truly desire? Open up about this to the group if you are comfortable, and leave space for everyone to have a chance to share.

So often Christians, even though they have the eternal hope found in Christ, still feel aimless. They still feel like they are wandering about this life without direction. Much of that has to do with the way our culture is set up. In our culture, if you are not “successful” in your job, or you don’t have some sort of long-range plan about how you are going to “arrive,” then you are in some sense failing. Even though this entire idea is flawed and is a creation of our culture which has been bathed in the American dream, even those of us who are Christians begin to buy into it and feel like we are failures. We continue to seek fulfillment and purpose and “success” in a job or a relationship or a hobby, all the while missing the God who is ready to give us absolute peace and fulfillment in relationship with him.

- Have you ever sensed yourself running toward some notion of “success,” in the process missing your opportunity to relate to God?
- Do you ever feel like your life is so busy with “stuff” that you have no time to seek Christ, the only one who can bring you true fulfillment and purpose and meaning?

Spend some time praying for each other, that you would remember that your search for meaning can only be fulfilled by a real relationship with God. Ask God to help each of you stop trying to make your own lives meaningful by filling it with stuff or by trying to succeed—and instead rest in his love and allow him to bring meaning to your life.

Huh?

Week 2

We are in the second week of our series “Huh?” where we are looking at some of the difficult and perplexing questions Jesus asked during his life. I think we all have questions we would love to have answered, but what happens when Jesus asks the questions?

One of the times in life when questions arise is when we are faced with fears.

- **What are some common fears or phobias? Do you have any of these fears?**
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Read: Matthew 8:23-27

The sea in the midst of a storm can be a dark and scary place. When the clouds grow dark and the waves begin to stir, it can be a terrifying experience.

- **What are some examples of storms we experience in life?**

When people face storms in their lives, sometimes the first reaction is to ask, “Why is this happening to me?” I wonder if this is the same reaction Jesus’ disciples have when they find themselves caught in a literal storm. The first thing we need to realize is why the disciples were out in this storm. They are not caught in the storm because they were doing something stupid. Or because they weren’t listening. Or because they were playing around. The disciples were caught out in the storm but because they were following Jesus. We read in verse 23, “Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.”

Jesus had been in Capernaum, spending his time healing people, talking with people, ministering to people, and he was tired and ready to go. So Jesus gets in a boat and the disciples get in with him. The Bible isn’t clear on whether or not Jesus knew there was a storm coming, but what it is clear is that the disciples got into the boat because they were following Jesus.

- **Have you ever asked the question “Why me?” when facing a storm in your life? Have you ever faced a storm because you were following Jesus?**

The God we worship is a sending God; that’s his nature. Just when we get comfortable, he sends us. He sent his son Jesus, he sent Moses, and Joshua, and Paul, and the disciples and Mary the mother of Jesus. What makes you think he won’t send you and me? Here’s the thing: don’t make the mistake that, just because you find yourself in the midst of a furious storm or in really deep water, that somehow you lost sight of Jesus. Indeed, he might be the one who sent you out there in the first place.

What we see is that this storm comes without warning. Sometimes you don’t get a call saying, “Hey, you have a storm coming your way.” Unfortunately, we don’t all have our own personal Super Doppler or Weather Channel to give us a warning for the storms that come in our lives. There are times when the storms in life come completely without warning.

At that point, the storm is on. The sky is black. The wind is gusting. The waves are breaking over the front of the boat. There’s no warning. There are no signs. There is no time to prepare or get ready. We didn’t ask for it, but the storm begins to rage.

And we, just like the disciples, often cry out, “Lord save us.”

So the disciples run to the back of the boat in a near panic. They are afraid for their lives. And they do what many people do in the midst of storms, they try to find Jesus. And when they do . . . Jesus is asleep. The God of the universe, the creator of the heavens and earth, the one and only Son of God, is sprawled out, asleep.

- **In the midst of a crisis or a storm in your life, have you ever felt like God was “sleeping?”**

The disciples scream out, “Lord save us! We’re going to drown!” Storms have a way of laying us bare, of stripping away all of the external things, of exposing us for who we are. When the storms of life come, it becomes clear what matters and what doesn’t. After all, the disciples aren’t worried about their hair or their clothes. This is a matter of sheer survival at this point.

And this is where Jesus asks the “Huh?” question for this week. The Bible says Jesus looks at the disciples and said, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” To me, this seems like one of the most easy to answer questions ever asked. Why are we so afraid? I don’t know, but it might have something to do with the fact our boat is about to sink because we’re caught in a storm so bad we might all die.

But I don’t think Jesus is asking about the storm. I think he is really asking, “What is it you really trust? What are you holding on to? Are you placing your trust in this boat? Are you placing your trust in your own ability to row? In each other? Do you think this storm is more powerful than I am?”

I think Jesus looks at us and asks the same thing. Why are you so afraid? And the underlying question is the same: where are you placing your trust?

Whether it’s your mom, your dad, your spouse, your kids, your job, your boss, your retirement fund, your good looks, your great personality, or your superior intellect – if you trust anything more than God, you will live the rest of your life in fear. When we place our trust in smaller things, the result in our lives is fear.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it like this:

Those who follow Jesus have no security, no possessions to call their own, not even a foot of earth to call their home, no earthly society to claim their absolute allegiance. Nay more, they have no spiritual power, experience or knowledge to afford them consolation or security. For his sake they have lost all. In following him they have lost even their own selves, and everything that could make them rich. Now they are poor – so inexperienced, so stupid, that they have no other hope but him who called them.

Jesus, stirred from his nap, looks out over the waves and says, “Be still.” And the Bible says, “It was completely calm.”

Read: Psalm 89:8-9

God rules over the storms of our lives. We aren’t called to avoid storms, but to put our faith and trust into the God of rules over the seas and the storms that can overwhelm us.

- What about us? When was the last time a storm raged in your life? How did (or are you currently) dealing with that storm?

But sometimes instead of trusting God, we trust our own ability to deal with the storms of life. We can rely on our own power. Or our own intelligence. Or our own resources. God longs for us to trust him so he can step into the midst of the storm and tell it to “be calm.”

- In what ways do people try to solve their own storms? How have you?

There are other times when we simply try to avoid storms in our lives. But God often calls us to walk boldly into storms as we follow him.

- What challenge is God calling you into? What is the adventure or the risk he is asking you to take?

Jesus’ question is the same one for us, “What do you fear?” The only real way for us to have lives that aren’t dominated by fear is to place our ultimate trust in God. What do you fear? Whom do you trust?

Huh?

Week 3

By: Kevin Bobrow

Day 1: *The Question*

During this series we are talking about some penetrating questions Jesus asked those around him. He regularly asked questions that cut through ulterior motives and pushed aside peripheral problems and got to the heart of the issue. He asked questions that made people pause and consider.

One time Jesus asked his disciples who the crowds said he was, and after they gave several different answers, he got to the heart of the issue, asking directly: “But what about you? Who do *you* say I am?” (Luke 9:18-20). He wanted them to think about not who he *might* be, or who the Gallup poll of the Roman empire said he was, but who they, in their own hearts, believed him to be.

I think Jesus still asks such pointed questions, if we have the ears to hear him. In the midst of our lives, if we listen, I think we can hear him asking us questions that slice through the periphery of our lives, where we so often have our focus. These questions get to the heart of who we are, what we believe, and why we live the way we do.

Be silent before God for a moment, and listen for what question he is asking you. If you feel God place a questions on your heart, write it down.

The question of Jesus we are going to focus on this week is one he asked his disciples, and possibly a larger crowd, during the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6.

Read Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus asked several poignant questions in these verses, questions that get to the heart of the way we think and the way we live. His basic point is that worrying about the details of our lives, such as what we will eat or what we will wear, is ludicrous. Why, according to Jesus, is it foolish to worry over the details of our lives?

Out of the questions Jesus asks in these verses, we are going to focus on his question related to the birds of the air. Jesus points the attention of his listeners to the birds. Perhaps he points out some birds flying, and he says, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” And then he asks this great question: **Are you not much more valuable than they?**

Ponder that question for a moment: are you more valuable than birds? Really—it might seem silly, but take a moment to truly consider it. Are you?

The birds do not have a bank account, nor do they have a job. They cannot plan for the future and cannot even remember yesterday, but they are *always* taken care of. God has made the world in such a way that they will be taken care of. One could argue that while birds are always taken care of, humans die of starvation or freeze to death. It is true that our world is far from what it was intended to be and injustices exist. Certainly there may be times when worry seems appropriate, for one's basic needs might not be met in certain circumstances.

But on the whole, we simply need not worry, because God knows what we need and will take care of us. We can trust him. The answer to the question is *yes, we are* more valuable than birds or dogs or any animal! Humans are the pinnacle of God's creation, and he has entrusted the rest of the world to our care. That means that even though we must care for the earth and not abuse it, we are more important than animals in God's sight! We are *his children!* And we *are*, indeed, more valuable than birds!

And if he takes care of the birds, we can certainly trust him to take care of us. We don't have to worry. This is no license for laziness ("I don't have to get a job, because God will take care of me"), but only a reminder that worry has no place for those who are God's children, who trust him to provide for our needs. He is trustworthy, and he has set us free from worry!

-Ask God to set you free from the worry present in your life, to give you peace and to help you trust in the midst of whatever difficulties you are facing.

Day 2: *The Issue*

The main issue we are confronting this week is worry. Worry is everywhere; it's an epidemic in our world. We worry as humanity: about wars, about global warming, about

natural disasters, about famines, and about economic stability. We worry as a country: about terrorism, about the national debt, about health care, about education, and about political issues. We worry as families: about money, about the kids, about getting into the right schools, about the future, and about our marriages. We worry as employees: about whether our company will last, about whether we'll be fired or laid off, and about whether we'll get a promotion. We worry as individuals: about relationships, about the economy, about finding a job, and about the future.

Are you getting the picture? We worry about *everything!* Worry is a part of the fabric of our world, a part of the climate in which we live. Yet Jesus, in the passage we read yesterday, said clearly, "Therefore *do not worry...*"

Why do you think this was a point of emphasis for Jesus? Why do you think he pushed hard for his followers not to worry?

I think we can get to the bottom of why this was such a crucial issue for Jesus by considering two questions regarding our worry:

- 1) *Why* do we worry?
- 2) *What does it communicate* when we worry?

First, why do we worry? Take a moment and consider what the two or three things you worry about most are. What do you worry most about, and why do you worry about those things?

The things you worry about may be important, but if we believe Jesus is telling the truth that worrying does no good, why do we still worry?

I think the main reason we worry is because **we are afraid**. Maybe we aren't afraid all the time, but we live in a crazy world where bad things happen and where it's difficult (or

impossible) to tell what is going to happen in the future. Our minds conjure up what *could* happen, or what *might* happen, or what has happened to others, and we begin to fear in our hearts. This fear drives us to worry.

But we do not have to be afraid. Over and over in the Bible people are told not to be afraid. With God in control, there is nothing to fear. We can have hope and joy, even in fearful times, and can rest in the fact that God will take care of us.

Jesus said in John 14:1, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” When fear begins to rise up in you and gives birth to worry, remember that Jesus is speaking to you in this verse, instructing you not to be troubled. *Don't be troubled, but trust.*

This doesn't mean we won't have troubles or struggles. Jesus also says in John 16:33, “In this world you *will* have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” This verse is perhaps the greatest reminder to me of why we don't need to worry. Our worries are always about troubles and struggles and issues we face in the world. But Jesus is saying even though we will face trouble in the world, and this trouble might lead to fear or worry, we can take heart *because Jesus has overcome the world!* There is nothing in this world that needs to lead us to fear or worry, because Jesus has overcome all of it. He has rescued us from the only thing we needed to fear, separation from God. We have been saved and restored and forgiven, and now we can look right into the face of our troubles and take heart! We can trust in the midst of our troubles that God will be with us and will make a way for us.

We worry because we're scared, but we must remember to trust in God and to take heart, because Jesus has conquered everything worth worrying about and has given us hope...

Second, what does it communicate when we worry? When we worry, people around us can tell. It changes our facial expressions, our posture, and our attitude. When others see us worry, what do you think it communicates to them (to our families, to our friends, to our co-workers, to our neighbors, etc.)?

What do you think it communicates to God?

Our worry communicates to others that we don't actually have a faith that extends to all of our life, a relationship with God that impacts our entire life for the better. It communicates that, though we say our God can do anything, we may not really believe it.

Our worry communicates to God that we don't trust him. We might say we do, we might even *want* to trust him, but our worry indicates that when it comes down to it, we cannot allow ourselves to trust that he has our best interest in mind and will always be there. Or at the least, we think we can fix our problems better than he can.

Paul, in confronting this tendency even of followers of Christ to worry, said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6) Paul wrote this while in prison, so he was in a unique position to talk about refusing to worry and simply presenting his requests to God.

Spend a few minutes and practice this. Present your requests to God. Whatever you have been worrying about, express to God why it is worrying you and ask him to take away the worry and give you peace...

Day 3: The Problem

So we have a problem. We might believe in God, and trust that he created the entire world—and can do anything he wants. We might trust that through the power of our God people were healed and raised from the dead, and that Jesus himself was raised from the dead. Many of us believe these things in our hearts, and trust the Bible when we read God is powerful enough to do anything.

But the problem is that even though we *believe* all these things about God, it often does not translate to our everyday life. This trust doesn't affect the way we live. This is particularly clear when it comes to our worry. How can we as Christians follow a Messiah who we claim died a gruesome death on the cross but was raised to life again and who now lives eternally—and yet worry because we aren't sure how we are going to make ends meet?

How can we claim to trust a God who made the entire universe simply by speaking, and yet worry because a problem at work? Certainly our concerns are important, and I am not trying to minimize them, but we are told again and again in the Scriptures what to do with our concerns: take them to God (1 Peter 5:7). God is mighty enough to save us, and he is mighty enough to help us with any problems we are having now.

What do you think keeps you from bringing the concerns and worries of your life to God?

I think one of the main reasons we struggle with worry, and one of the main reasons we consistently fail to bring our concerns to God, is because we have been taught by our culture that we must be **self-sufficient and independent**. If we have a problem, and especially if we caused the problem, it is our responsibility to fix it. Once we become adults, we cannot go running to our parents to bail us out; we need to own up to our problems and find a solution. While there may be some wisdom in this, since we each should take responsibility for our own lives, this mentality actually harms our relationship with God. God certainly created each of us to own our lives and taking responsibility for them. But in a real sense he also wants us to be dependent—on him. He wants us to come to him for help. He wants an ongoing relationship with us where we do not ever have to fear or worry, because we know he is here for us.

God is less concerned with you being a strong man or woman who stands on your own feet than he is with you being his child.

One of the things it seems we consistently worry about, and even more so in the current American climate, is having enough money. It seems to cost an extraordinary amount of money to live, eat, pay a mortgage, put gas in the car, keep everyone clothed, pay all the insurances, etc. Sometimes I feel like life would be easier if I lived in a tent and walked everywhere! Money is consistently near the top of the list of things that induce worry; the

fear that we will run out of money or lose our house or not be able to take care of our children.

When it comes to our financial situation, we feel an extra bit of pressure to be independent and self-sufficient. I want us to check out a passage that speaks to this issue. In Luke 12:13, we are told, “Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.””

Jesus makes it clear that he is not a financial judge, and then in verse 15 he says to the crowd, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”**

This is a crucial statement. First, worrying about money is a form of greed. Why is that? Because if we are clamoring for more money, or stressing to find more ways to get money, we are trying to take our sustenance into our own hands. We are not trusting God but are basically saying we must handle this area of our lives on our own. This leads to a greedy mentality that seeks after money instead of being grateful for whatever we have.

Second, Jesus emphasizes that our lives do not consist of our possessions. We can stress and worry all we want about not having enough money, but more money does not solve the problems of our lives.

What is most difficult for you about living such a “worry-free”, trusting life?

Are you willing to give up being so self-sufficient and trust your Father to take care of every need you have?

-Spend some time in prayer, asking God to help you give up on your need for independence and self-sufficiency.

-Ask him to help you trust him and depend on him, even when you have absolutely no idea how he is going to provide for your needs.

Day 4: What Would Your Life Look Like?

If you never worried about anything, but simply prayed about everything that might make you worry, what would your life look like? How would it look different than it does today? I want us to spend today pondering this question, because I think one of God's greatest passions for our lives is for us to be free—free from anything that would hinder us from being exactly the person he made us to be.

How might a lack of worry change your relationships (your marriage, your relationship with your kids, your relationship with family or friends, etc.)?

How might a lack of worry change your lifestyle?

How might a lack of worry change your future plans?

How might a lack of worry change **you**?

We are going to spend a few minutes looking at people whose lives were not controlled by worry or fear. None of us should try to live their lives, but we can look to others in history or around us for inspiration, to see what lives not bound by fear can accomplish. Whoever God has made you to be, whatever his plans are for you, you can be that person and accomplish those plans, and you don't have to let worry stop you.

Consider Francis of Assisi. You've probably heard of him, even if you've never studied his life. Here is a man who was not held back by worry. He felt called by God to lay aside his wealth and live in poverty, serving others. So this is what he did. One story tells how his

father attempted to persuade him to pursue being a lawyer instead of serving the poor. Francis explained how he was called to live a life of poverty, but his father would hear none of it. To avoid being further pressured by his father, Francis took off everything he had been given by his father, even his clothes, and went on serving.

Francis had his quirks and wasn't perfect, but it's clear he was not constrained by worry. He did not worry about how his needs were going to be met, but trusted God to take care of him and went on doing what he felt called to do.

Now consider Martin Luther King, Jr. He was another man who was not held back by worry. Though he lived during a violent time when African Americans were killed for doing much less than what King was doing, he went on speaking and preaching the truth that there is equality among all people. He also wasn't perfect, but he felt called to speak out about the injustices he saw around him. And he certainly made a huge difference in our nation and our world. If he had let worry hold him back, we may all live in a much different world.

Consider the apostle Paul, who gave up everything to share the good news about Jesus with the world. Think of all the things he could have been worried about. He recounts in 2 Corinthians 11 that he faced beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, attacks from enemies, and more—all because he was sharing the news about Jesus. Yet he never stopped, no matter how many times his life was in danger. Here was a man who simply did not worry—that's why when he says (from prison) not to be anxious about anything, but that we ought to take it to heart and trust in God.

What if he had? The world would be a much different place, and who knows how many fewer people would have come to know Christ throughout the centuries if Paul had not put his life on the line again and again to follow God's call, without fear and worry.

God has so much he wants to do through our lives. We were meant for more than simply surviving life. He wants you to be fully alive, fulfilling whatever call he has for you. But for you to do this, you must let go of worry. You must let go of having to control everything that happens in your life, or having everything figured out. You must listen to God's voice and trust that he will provide for all your needs...

What might God be calling you to do that you have been ignoring or putting off because worry has been holding you back?

What steps could you take to begin pursuing this call?

-Ask God for the strength to fulfill the plans he has for you, even though there might be so many unknowns.

-Ask him to help you become who he wants you to be.

-Ask God for the courage to lay worry aside and trust him to provide in every way.

Day 5: The Solution

After looking at the issue of worry all week, and seeing that not only did Jesus tell us not to worry but that it also holds us back from the life God has for us, is there a solution? Is there a way for us to be free of worry?

Today we are going to revisit our primary passage and find there the solution to ridding ourselves of worry.

Re-read Matthew 6:25-34 carefully:

Did you see the solution to worry in these verses? Jesus is basically telling his followers that they need a complete paradigm shift, a complete restructuring of their perspective on life. We must alter our mindset.

Instead of occupying our thoughts with where our next meal will come from or, more accurately in America, how we will afford vacation or college for our kids, we change our focus away from ourselves and our needs. We can try to plan for the future, but we do not

dwell on these needs—as Jesus says above, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” **Jesus is pushing us to give up worrying about our own sustenance, our own success, and our own advancement.**

He specifically is *not* saying that our needs are unimportant. He says that God knows what we need and *will* take care of us. Our needs matter. But if we want to be everything we can be, and be free from the worry that binds us, we must not allow our minds to be bogged down with such concerns. And here is what we must do instead:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

What do you think it means to seek God’s Kingdom?

As Christians, we have transferred our primary citizenship. It would almost be similar in worldly terms to moving to another country and becoming a citizen of that country. We have become a part of the Kingdom of God. We don’t move anywhere necessarily, but our mindset changes. The way we view the world and live in that world changes. We no longer are interested in building our own kingdom; we are focused on building something much greater.

When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, he is talking about the activity of God, the activity that is often unseen and flows underneath and all around our experience in this world. God is always at work, and he has a great and wonderful plan for the world. Ever since the very beginning, when humans sinned and set the course of the world on a trajectory far from what God intended, our God has been on a mission. He is on a mission to set things right. He has been working to redeem the entire world.

And when we decide to follow Jesus, in some sense we give up our citizenship in this world. In another very important sense we become even *better* citizens of our world, and we certainly do not give up our engagement in the world, sitting in our guarded fortresses of faith and shunning the world. This seems to be precisely what Jesus warned the religious elite of his time against. But what we give up when we follow Christ is a striving for the

things of this world and for our advancement and success in this world. This should fade away if we are following Christ, because we are a part of a much different Kingdom.

To seek God's Kingdom first means that we push ourselves and our wants and even our needs into the background. We put away our striving to succeed, our striving to be something in the eyes of the world. And instead we focus on God and his Kingdom, signing on to be a part of the building of his great plan for the world. We become one of his passionate workers who will do anything to make him known to the world, who will do anything to further his causes and his passions for our world. This often means we do things that don't make sense to those around us, like giving up opportunities for more power and more money and more notoriety. We do not shun the world, but we simply aren't concerned with the building of our own kingdom any more. We are occupied with something so much greater—the building of an eternal plan, a plan to save and redeem the entire world.

And when we are occupied with this Kingdom, we are simply able to stop worrying! No longer do our needs and problems seem so severe when we have God's great mission in mind. When we are workers in his Kingdom, important parts of his team to accomplish his great mission for the world, even the most significant problems in our lives seem well within his reach. Further, since we know we are God's children and even his *partners* in this great work, we know he will not forsake us. We know he will not leave us out in the cold or fail to meet our needs; we know he is good and we know we can trust him.

Worry can cease when we come to grasp just how great God's love is for the world and *for us*, and we take it to heart that he truly *will* take care of us. He is taking care of the birds, after all!

Have you truly signed on to be a part of God's Kingdom work? This is not something that pastors sign on for while the others cheer them on—this is the calling of every Christian. If you have not truly signed on to partner with him in his mission, take a moment and express to him that you want to. Ask him to change your perspective, even the citizenship of your heart. Ask him to take away your worry as you concern yourself primarily with advancing his Kingdom instead of with your own happiness or advancement.

- Spend some time thanking him for all he's done in your life and in the world
- Ask him to make you an effective worker for him, a great partner in his work

-Ask for wisdom to see how being concerned primarily for his Kingdom should change your life

Huh? Week 3

Small Group Guide

Begin your group time by reading through the primary passage for this week, Matthew 6:25-34. For another snapshot of the same teaching, read Luke 12:13-34.

The passage is primarily about worrying. **What are the primary things you worry about?** Think for a moment about what worries you carry throughout the week and share with the group when you're ready.

Jesus asks the question in this passage, "Are you not more valuable than they?" Certainly the answer to this question is yes—we are more valuable than birds. Yet we still so often let worry overtake us.

What do you think it communicates to God and to others when we seem to doubt the answer to this question and when we let the worries of our daily lives consume us? Why might this be important?

One of the things we need to get past, perhaps the main thing that causes us to worry, is the pressure we feel to be completely self-sufficient and independent. Part of being a Christian is recognizing that we are a child of God, and will never be self-sufficient. In fact, we should in some sense strive to be *dependent*.

What is hardest about this for you?

What areas of your life do you have the hardest time releasing control over?

Perhaps you have sensed God's leading to do something big, or to change your life in a significant way, but something has stopped you. Often it is uncertainty, or fear, that leads to worry. And nothing will halt God's work more quickly than worry.

If you eliminated worry from your life and trusted God to take care of you, what might you do?

What changes might you make in your life?

God's desire for you is to seek first his Kingdom and not worry about anything. As we allow the worries and concerns of our daily lives to fade away and run after much more important things, what used to weigh us down will fade away and we will be able to trust that the God who is working to make all things right will certainly take care of us.

Pray for each other, that you would each seek first God's Kingdom and partner with him to accomplish his mission. Ask God to help your worries about your own sustenance or your success or your advancement fade away while you focus on the advancement of his Kingdom.

Huh? Week 4

This is week four in our current series called "Huh?" where we've been taking a closer look at some of the questions Jesus asked while he was on earth. This week we're going to look at two very interesting questions Jesus asked during one eventful day. One thing to keep in mind while reading these stories is that, while we might know the outcome of these stories, the people living through these experiences did not know how things would turn out. For them the outcome was very much in doubt.

Read: Luke 8:40-48

As Jesus began teaching, he was interrupted. A large crowd of people were gathered together to hear what Jesus had to say, yet they didn't hear a sermon or get any instruction

that day because Jesus was interrupted but Jairus. Jairus was an important man by any standard. He was a ruler of the synagogue, which made him one of the religious elites in his day. Jairus came to Jesus with a very straightforward request: save my daughter.

Jairus had a daughter who was very ill, almost to the point of death. This had actually gotten so bad he was willing to try anything. This included coming to Jesus hoping against hope for a miracle. If only you would touch her, Jairus said, I know she'll be healed. We're not told what the reaction of the crowd is at hearing the request Jairus made. We don't know if there were gasps of shock at such a bold request or if there were murmurs of indignation at their lesson being interrupted. We don't know how the crowd reacted, but it's clear how Jesus did. Jesus, on hearing the simple request of Jairus, stopped teaching the crowd and followed Jairus to his house.

This sets the stage for the first "Huh?" question we'll be looking at this week. The crowd had gathered to listen to Jesus, to see if there was something more to him than any other rabbi or teacher. Of course they weren't going to miss an opportunity to see a real life miracle face to face. The throngs of people who had gathered to hear Jesus speak got up and followed Jesus to where Jairus and his daughter were living.

Perhaps you know what it's like to travel along side a mass of people. If you've ever been to a professional football or baseball game you have some idea. When the game is over and everyone is headed toward their cars, there are normally masses of people who will travel together down the road. When the walkway or road becomes narrow, this mass of people is condensed into a closely formed mob. Picture a similar scene in the life of Jesus. A mob of people got up and followed Jesus. They wanted to see if the impossible was possible and to catch a glimpse of something none of them had ever seen. Yet, this mass of people aren't walking down wide roads and large thoroughfares. They are crammed together down small side roads and dusty streets. We get the impression that mass of people was so dense and tightly packed that they were jostling into each other.

For most people this would be an uncomfortable and highly undesirable situation. For one woman it was the perfect opportunity. There's no getting around this is an odd story. In the midst of a crushing crowd and with a young girl's life hanging in the balance, Jesus gets interrupted again. You can get a sense of the urgency surging through the crowd. They know something is about to happen. Can Jesus get to the little girl in time to make any difference? Even if he does get there in time, is there anything this teacher can do? It feels

like an episode of a hospital drama, where a life hangs on the edge and you know time is running out. There is no room for mistakes or missteps. The clock is ticking. Except Jesus doesn't seem to have the same urgency as everyone else because he allows himself to be interrupted from his original purpose.

Jesus, in the middle of a crushing crowd, is touched. Yet, there was something different about this touch. This wasn't merely someone who brushed against him or someone reaching out to shake his hand like a spectator at a political rally. Someone actually touched him. We read in the Bible that Jesus noticed the touch because he felt power go out of him. This is a really odd thing to read, as if someone plugged into Jesus' battery without his consent and power flowed from Jesus without his permission. Whatever the case, Jesus knew someone touched him in a way very different from everyone else.

And he asks the first "Huh?" question of his day. He asks, "Who touched me?" His disciples react much in the same way I expect we all would. Are you kidding me, they say. There are hundreds, maybe thousands, of people pressing in on us. We are almost being trampled by them. Who touched you? Who isn't touching you? Look at all these people. It's impossible for you not to be touched in this situation.

But Jesus is asking an entirely different question. Jesus wanted to know who it was that actually touched him, not just in a merely physical way, but in such a deep and meaningful way that power could transfer from him to them. Who reached out to him with so much faith and trust and hope that healing and restoration could happen almost against his will?

The answer, it turned out, was a woman who shouldn't have even been in the crowd in the first place. The woman who touched Jesus was sick, and had been for a long time. She had been sick and bleeding for twelve years. It's hard to know exactly what was wrong with her, but it doesn't really matter. In the first century, blood was one of the things that made a Jewish person "unclean." Someone who was unclean wasn't allowed to be out and among other "clean" people, otherwise they would contaminate everyone else. By all rights, this woman should have been home alone.

But then she heard about Jesus. She heard about some of the unbelievable things he was reported to have done. She heard about other people he was purported to have healed. She heard of other hopeless cases he entered into. Perhaps she had nothing left to lose. If she had been sick for twelve years, she most likely had spent every dime she had on different

cures and treatments, but none of them worked. For twelve years she lived as an outcast, as a pariah among her own family and countrymen. For twelve years she lived in isolation. Then she heard about Jesus. And he was coming to town.

She lost herself in the crowd. No one was looking for her anyway; all eyes were on Jesus. When Jesus began moving down the street, she saw her opportunity. She moved closer and closer to him, thinking if only she could touch his cloak she would be healed. There was no reason to bother Jesus or to inconvenience him with her troubles. She just wanted to get close enough to touch him.

The word translated "touched" doesn't mean what we normally think when we mean "feel". Yet, many in the crowd "felt him" or brushed up against him. There were many people who touched his cloak and came into contact with Jesus physically.

It's the same way with us. Many people come to church and "feel" something. They may feel a sense the presence of the God. They may feel a sense of what God is doing in the world. They may get excited about what they experience during a church service. Yet, many people walk away from the experience just as lonely, just as broken, just as jealous, just as miserable, and just as sick as when they walked in the doors.

Perhaps it's because we hope God will touch us but we never reach out to touch him. The word "touched" in this passage can actually be translated as "to fasten oneself to."

It connotes getting a "death grip" on something. This is the way a drowning person grabs a life raft. The word implies grabbing hold without the intention of ever letting go.

There were people in the crowd who could say, "We were there when it happened." They were a part of the crowd. They were all witnesses to what took place. They could testify to what transpired. Yet, they never moved past simply coming near Jesus to actually coming into real contact with him.

I think the difference is that the bleeding woman was desperate to be healed. She was desperate. She had come to the point in life where she didn't have any other choices. There were no other avenues available for her. There were no more treatments or options. When she saw Jesus, she knew he was her last chance. She needed to be healed and Jesus, she knew, was her only chance left.

So many times when we come into contact with Jesus it is a casual encounter. We don't expect anything to be changed. We might actually be angry if something did change. We often want things to remain the same. We like the good feelings and we want to experience something nice, but we often don't want real, genuine change. We often don't want to be healed in such a way that we walk away a different person.

But the question of Jesus remains the same: "Who touched me?"

I wonder if we've ever reached out to Jesus with the hope and the desperation of knowing that if Jesus can't help us, no one can. I wonder if we've ever come to the realization that we are all mortally wounded and none of us can save ourselves. I wonder if we've ever come face to face with the fact that, like the woman in this story, we can try every other remedy in the world, yet no other remedy can save us.

When we do get to that point, to the point of desperation, will we let that desperation lead us to reach out to Jesus?

Jesus turns to the woman and tells her that her faith in him has made her well. He then tells her to go in peace. And for the first time in twelve years, maybe for the first time in her life, she is able to go in peace. For the first time in her life she has an idea of what peace even means.

Yet, the interruption has taken too much time. The little girl, the daughter of Jairus, is dead.

Read: Mark 5:35-43

The people came to Jesus to let him know not to waste his time, there's no reason for him to continue on. The girl has died. Jesus continued to the house anyway and found exactly what you'd expect to find in such a situation: a family in grief. People were crying and wailing and overwrought with grief over the death of the little girl. Jesus then asked the second "Huh?" question of the day.

"Why all this commotion and wailing?"

This might be one of the most obvious questions ever asked. Why is everyone crying? Because a little girl, a girl that was dearly loved and cherished, has just died. Why all the commotion? Because people are feeling a deep sense of pain and loss. If there's one thing we've come to know for sure in our lives and in our world, it's that death is the ultimate irreversible thing. Sickness can be healed. But when sickness crosses the threshold of life into death, there is nothing that can be done. Modern medicine and thousands of years of technological advances haven't changed that reality. When someone is dead, that's the end.

Or is it? Jesus says there's no reason to react the way they were because the little girl wasn't dead, merely sleeping. And they all laugh at him. In the face of their grief, they know lunacy when they hear it. These aren't naïve people. They know the difference between sleep and death. And so they laugh.

Jesus is undeterred. He put everyone out of the house except for the mother, father, and his disciples. Jesus took the dead girl by the hand (breaking, for the second time that day, the laws which would prevent him from touching something "unclean") and told her to wake up. At once the little girl got up, as if waking from a nap. Everyone was astonished (an understatement, to be sure).

Jairus, just like the woman suffering from bleeding, was desperate. He waited until his daughter was at death's door before he came to Jesus. He waited until it was almost too late. He waited until he didn't have any more options. Then he turned to Jesus and everything in his life changed.

Could you imagine what it must have been like to see his daughter playing and singing and dancing after that day? Could you imagine a moment when Jairus could have forgotten the amazing way Jesus showed up and rescued his daughter from the jaws of death? Could you imagine Jairus ever taking that for granted again?

Death, the one true irrevocable thing, is no longer irrevocable. While we don't see this sort of miracle play out when it comes to the deaths of our bodies, the great promise we see in the Bible is that Jesus ensures those who follow and trust in him will never experience death of their souls.

Yet, how easy it is for us to forget. How easy is it for us to live as if we weren't desperate. The real truth is all of humanity is desperate, but we find clever ways to distract ourselves

from coming face to face with this fact. I hope we never forget that we all live in a desperate state. I hope we all allow the desperateness of our lives to drive us to Jesus. I hope we never forget the healing and new life we have through him. And I hope we never look at our lives the same way again.

Jesus asked two questions. Jesus used, and is still using, these questions to help people see the truth of who he is and what that means for us.

Huh?

Week 4

Small Group Guide

1. Name as many classic or famous questions as you can?
2. What makes for a “good” question?
3. What is it about desperation that drives people to try something new and different?
What is it about desperation that can drive people toward God?
4. Have you ever experienced a sense of desperation? How did you react to it?
5. What do you think it means to truly “touch” Jesus? How is this different from merely being near him or coming into contact with him?
6. How do you think the life of the “bleeding woman” and Jairus would have been different after their encounters with Jesus?
7. Why do you think it’s so easy to forget how Jesus has healed us and given us new life?
What do you think it would look like in your life to avoid taking this for granted?

Huh?
Week 5
By: Kevin Bobrow

Who or What Are You Looking For?

Day 1: Missing Jesus

This week we are going to explore the question of who or what you are really looking for. What is it you really want? The question Jesus asked that spurs our focus for this week is found in John chapter 20, after his resurrection. We are told that early on Sunday Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid and saw that the stone had been rolled away. She ran to Peter and John and told them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

This group of Jesus and his followers had been so persecuted by the leaders of both the Jews and Romans that apparently she assumed these leaders had added yet another insult and had taken Jesus’ body away. Peter and John ran for the tomb, and John tells us that he and Peter went inside the tomb and saw the strips of linen folded up. Verse 8 tells us that after John saw the folded up strips of cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus, “he saw and believed.”

Apparently he didn’t share his understanding or belief with the others, or at least not with Mary, because she stayed there after Peter and John left, crying outside the tomb. How sad. This woman has been following Jesus for years. Now he has been executed, though innocent of all charges. And now she wants to pay her respects to her Lord and is crushed that his grave has been robbed. How can he rest in peace if his body has been taken away? This is a woman in a deep state of mourning. She wants to grieve and mourn over her great loss, but it seems she cannot even mourn Jesus because yet another injustice has been done.

Then something happens. Through her tears, as she looks into the tomb, she sees two men in white sitting where Jesus’ body had been. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” Though she has just seen angels who have appeared in Jesus’ tomb before her, she still does not understand. She simply wants to find Jesus’ body! Then she turned around and saw Jesus himself, standing there.

But she did not realize it was Jesus! “Woman,” Jesus said, “Why are you crying? **Who is it you are looking for?**” “Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’”

Isn't that incredible? Mary has something in her mind, something she is incredibly passionate about. But she has completely missed the point. She so badly wants to care for Jesus' body (certainly an admirable desire) that her heart cannot conceive of the incredible good news before her. *She wants to find his body so badly that she cannot even see Jesus staring her in the face.*

Do you ever get caught up in what you want and miss that what you need is right in front of you?

Do you ever just miss Jesus because you are so caught up in seeking after what you *think* you need?

You can even be busy seeking after Christian things, things that seem worthy and godly, and miss Jesus. Does this ever describe you? Are you ever content with the *idea* of following Jesus, missing a real relationship with him in the process?

This was certainly the case for Mary. She was busy seeking after things that all would have described as worthy and wholesome and good, but they ended up being worthless things. There is no need to worry about preserving Jesus' dead body when he is standing healthy in front of you! I think so often churches and individual Christians also join in this business of "preserving" things: the best worship style, the correct way to order a worship service, the proper beliefs about specific theological issues, etc. And while we are busy preserving, Christ is still living, inviting us to live and walk with him! We don't need to preserve and protect the *idea* of Jesus; rather, we will be transformed and will change the world by walking with him every day, opening our eyes to all he is doing and wants to do in our lives and in our circles of influence.

In what ways have you been guilty of "missing Jesus" for the sake of other things, even good things?

Are there things in your life that might be distracting you, clouding your vision, so that you are not able to see Jesus right in front of you? What are those things, and what do you think you should do about them?

After Mary failed to recognize Jesus, instead thinking he was the gardener and asking him to just return Jesus' body, Jesus said to her in verse 16, "Mary."

I picture her stopping in her tracks, her eyes widening, her mouth falling open. I picture a moment of recognition in her eyes, when it hits her that the reason his body is missing is not because someone has moved it but because Jesus has **risen**. I picture tears of joy and of overwhelming emotion streaming down her cheeks as she exclaims "Teacher!" It's like the veil over her eyes and heart had been lifted so she could see... Now she understood.

I think we all need a similar moment of understanding, a moment when the veil over our hearts is lifted and we stop seeking the idea of Jesus and instead see Jesus in front of us, reaching out to us to come spend time with him.

What habits or routines or life choices have been making you miss Jesus?

What have you been busying yourself with that probably just doesn't matter?

-Spend some time in prayer about these things, and ask the Lord to help you make the changes you need to make so you don't miss him any more.

Day 2: Children of Hell

I think I can say that Jesus despised something. If there was one thing Jesus despised, it was religious rituals—performing a “religious” task because it was expected or customary and supposedly made you “holier,” but had no real bearing on the heart.

We are told in Luke 11:37-38 that Jesus, after he finished speaking on a certain occasion, was invited by a Pharisee to come eat with him. When Jesus went into his home and reclined at the table, the Pharisee noticed and was surprised by the fact that Jesus did not first wash, as was the ceremonial Jewish custom. In Luke this is what led Jesus to speak his “woes” to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Many have pictured Jesus as railing angrily against these religious leaders, who were in some sense his enemies, but I don’t think this is the case at all. I think these men were his acquaintances, some even his friends, with whom he was in constant conversation. After all, he was reclining at the table with them, most likely regularly. The fact that the religious leaders were eventually instrumental in his death should not obscure the fact that Jesus actually was conversing with them regularly, teaching them and pushing them to see things his way.

So I don’t think Jesus was angry with them when he spoke these “woe to you” statements. I think he was warning these religious leaders, whom he cared about, against some of their habits he found despicable.

Read these “woe to you” statements in Matthew 23:1-36.

Let’s look at a couple highlights from these verses. Verses 23-24 say, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat to swallow a camel.”

Now *that’s* a graphic picture, swallowing a camel! But oh are they careful to strain out that gnat before they eat it! This is the main point Jesus is communicating. These religious leaders are incredibly careful to obey every small law in the Scriptures and in the additional teachings of the rabbis. But while they are obeying every minor instruction (and making sure others do) they forget to actually be the kind of people God wants (as Micah 6:8 puts it, to “do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”)! They have become so caught up in *religious rituals* that they have forgotten what these rituals were all about—a life committed to and centered on God.

Another highlight from verse 15: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are!”

Wow! Again, Jesus says they are doing good things but are missing even more important things. They are working hard to win converts, which in itself is a great thing—telling people about God and introducing them to faith in him. But for these religious leaders, making converts had become less about introducing people to a relationship with God and more about initiating them into a long list of religious rituals. Enthusiastic new followers would then become excited not about becoming the kind of person God desires but about meticulously adhering to these rules and rituals.

So what, for Jesus, is a child of hell? He is not talking about the prodigal son here, a degenerate sinner far from God. *Jesus is saying a child of hell, a person devoted to purposes that run contrary to the purposes of God, is the one who legalistically follows every religious rule but neglects a true relationship with God.*

Consider your own life and actions and attitude. Could you ever be described as a child of hell? Why or why not?

I know I certainly act like a child of hell sometimes. At times I am more concerned with how I appear to others than with how I appear to God. I am more concerned about following through on all the religious trappings than with having a heart fully devoted to Christ. I am more concerned with others being impressed at my walk with God than I am with ever actually walking with God...

In what ways have you been acting like a child of hell in this sense? How have you been more concerned with your appearance than with following Christ?

Where has legalism crept into your life? In what ways have you become more concerned with your outward appearance and than with the condition of the heart?

In what areas of your life have you allowed sin to exist privately, while you maintain the façade of holiness to your Christian brothers and sisters?

More than anything, Jesus is saying that this must stop. We must ruthlessly confront the sin in our hearts and, by comparison, not care about our appearance to others. We should be far more concerned with actually having clean hearts before God than we are with appearing to be holy to those around us.

Spend some time in confession before God:

-Confess to him the areas where you have given into legalism

-Confess to him the areas where you have cared more about your appearance than the condition of your heart

Ask him for the strength to lay aside a concern to be holy in the eyes of others, and for a passion to walk humbly with God, faults and all.

Day 3: Choose What Is Better

Yesterday we explored whether we are really seeking after a holy appearance or a holy heart. Today we are going to explore whether we are seeking after performing tasks or giving our time. For some, it is much easier to be given a list of tasks to do than it is to sit with and contemplate the state of our souls. For some it seems simpler to check off a spiritual to-do list than to really slow down and spend time in God's presence. *Though tasks are a part of life, and serving in tangible ways is an important part of every Christian's life, we must choose whether we will pursue a relationship with God that is focused on doing tasks or one that is focused on spending time...*

Another snapshot from the gospel of Luke gives us great insight into this issue. Jesus was traveling and teaching, and we are told that he and his disciples came to a village (which we learn from the book of John is the village of Bethany). Luke 10:38 tells us that in Bethany, "a woman named Martha opened her home to him." This was a sign of welcome, of honor. Apparently Martha knew who Jesus was and wanted to show her admiration, so she opened her home to him. The fact that Martha was mentioned probably meant she was the leader of the household, probably the older sister of Mary.

Verse 39 says, "She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." I get the impression that Jesus was sitting among the friends or family present in Martha's home, talking with them or perhaps teaching them. Meanwhile, Martha was busy. Verse 40a says, "But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." Perhaps she was busy preparing a meal or a part of the home for entertaining. We don't know, but we know she was keeping very busy—she was distracted. In verse 40b we are told, "She came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'"

This seems like such a strange thing to say, doesn't it? Jesus is in your home, the honored guest, and you are complaining to him because your sister isn't helping you? It seems like something a little girl would do. Maybe they all knew each other well, or maybe it was said more sarcastically than in a whiny fashion. But whatever the case,

Jesus' response is what we care about. Verses 41-42 say, "'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. **Mary has chosen what is better**, and it will not be taken away from her.'"

Let's give Martha the benefit of the doubt here. Let's assume that what she was working on genuinely needed to be done. This would seem to fit with her complaining about having to do it by herself while everyone else spent time with Jesus. Let's assume she didn't really *want* to be working instead of spending time but felt that she had to. Even so, *Jesus made it clear that spending quality time with him is superior to completing tasks for him, even tasks that must be done.*

I think the same truth applies to us. Serving God is crucial, and finding ways to use the gifts he's given us to serve others and strengthen his church is an important part of being a follower of Christ. But such service must always come after and flow out of time spent with Christ, at his feet. Our service is not how we connect with Christ; our service is our response to Christ's love, which we experience as we spend time with him!

Do you ever struggle to remember this? Do you ever keep yourself so busy, even with good things, that you fail to stop and simply spend time with the Lord?

What are the primary things that distract you from spending time in God's presence?

Do you tend to be more of a Martha or a Mary? Are you more focused on a daily basis on what you need to do to serve God or on how you need to make time to be with him?

Though you may have a personality that makes it difficult for you to stop and be still, one that tends toward always being on the go and checking things off your list, you must learn to choose what is better. You must make it a point to stop and be with Christ. And you must remember that in God's view, taking time to invest in your relationship with him is better than all the service you could do for him.

For others of us, it's not so much that we have a personality that tends toward constant motion but rather that we are unsure of what spending time with God means, or what that looks like. We would be content to stop and spend time with him if we knew how. If this describes you, a great resource for learning how to spend time with God is a book by Ruth Haley Barton called *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*.

No matter our personalities, we must do whatever it takes to choose what is better. We must eliminate whatever distractions might keep us from spending time with God—listening to him and learning from him and growing closer to him. More than anything, he wants to communicate his love for us, his presence with us, and his plan for us.

- Ask for God's forgiveness when you busy yourself with so many tasks but fail to do the most important thing.
- Thank God for his great love for us, and that he wants to spend time with us more than he wants our service.
- Ask for the strength to put all the distractions that keep you from spending time with the Lord aside.

Day 4: Looking for the Wrong Jesus

Luke tells another beautiful story near the end of his gospel. At this moment in the gospel story, Jesus has been raised from the dead, though his followers are not aware of it yet. We are told in Luke 24:13 that two of Jesus' disciples were on their way to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. The risen Jesus comes up and walks with them, though they did not recognize him. Read what happens in Luke 24:17-35.

What a beautiful passage! There are two sections of this passage I want you to really notice. First, when these disciples are explaining to Jesus (who they don't realize is Jesus) what has happened, they say, "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."

Of course, as Christians looking back, we can see the irony of their statement. It was precisely through Jesus' death on the cross that he *did* redeem not only Israel but the whole world! But you must understand there is no way they could have understood that in this moment. We talk about crucifixion quite easily and without much emotional reaction, but then we have never witnessed a crucifixion. Rome used crucifixion as a punishment quite intentionally, for everyone who witnessed a crucifixion could surely never forget it. How gruesome it was, how unbearable to witness the pain, how stomach churning, how shameful. In every sense, being crucified was the worst fate that one could meet. Not only did it mean death, but a shameful, embarrassing, gruesome, and painful death. There is no way his followers could have sensed at this moment, with their understanding of crucifixion, that Jesus had indeed redeemed Israel through this act. The great movement of redemption they thought he was bringing had been snuffed out, and with a gruesome flourish...

The second section of this passage I want you to notice is Jesus' words to them after they explained why they were so down. Verses 25-27 say, "He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

What did Jesus explain to them? He explained that the Christ had to suffer in order to redeem! And he showed them how the Scriptures pointed to this suffering—how it should not have been surprising!

Jesus himself had told his disciples on *many* occasions that he would suffer, even that he would die at the hands of the religious leaders. But they brushed his comments aside, or did not understand them, or even (in Peter's case) rebuked him for such a statement! He had also offered veiled statements about his body ("this temple") being destroyed but then "rebuilt" in three days (John 2:18-21).

What these two sections of our story make clear is that the disciples of Jesus were so confused and devastated by the events that had ended Jesus' life because *they were looking for the wrong Jesus*. Even as they spent time with him and followed him, they understood Jesus to be the conquering Jewish Messiah who would throw off the yoke of Rome and rescue Israel from foreign domination once and for all. I think they understood themselves to be a part of history, specifically of Israel's history. Jesus would set Israel free and once again make her into a great nation respected and feared by all the world! They had seen Jesus perform miracles, even raise people from the dead; surely he could redeem Israel in this way.

So when they saw him led to the slaughter, when they watched him crucified like a common criminal, when he did not fight back or come down from the cross in power, all they could feel was defeat. To them, "crucified Messiah" was an oxymoron that made no sense. A Messiah would establish his throne like King David; he would not be humiliated on a cross.

But Jesus, on that road, explained to them from the Scriptures why a crucified Christ made perfect sense. He explained why the Christ had to suffer, showing them from the Scriptures why this was all part of God's plan. Later in the passage these disciples say their hearts had been burning within them as he shared with them; they were starting to see things God's way. They were starting to again have hope, to understand they had been looking for the wrong Jesus all along.

They were looking for a national Messiah, for the savior of Israel. They were looking for a military leader who would throw off Rome. They were looking for a leader who would show off his power and revel in the victory of Israel!

This, of course, was not the way of Jesus. And it's not how God works in general. He speaks in whispers, he moves us in our souls in gentle ways, and he typically changes the world through yielded servants rather than through empowered kings. When Jesus submitted to such a terrible death, he was not taking the throne as the savior of Israel;

he was breaking the chains of sin for all humankind for all eternity, ascending as the Savior of the whole world in his resurrection.

Are you, like the disciples, ever guilty of looking for the wrong Jesus? Think carefully about this. In what ways do you seek after or model your life after a Jesus who is different from the real one—a Savior who submitted to death and humiliation?

Henri Nouwen in his book *Letters to Marc About Jesus* (which I highly recommend), talks about this issue in an insightful way. He says, “The love of God...[is] made visible through Jesus...in the descending way. That is the great mystery of the Incarnation. God has descended to us human beings to become a human being with us; and once among us, he descended to total dereliction of one condemned to death. It isn’t easy really to feel and understand from the inside this descending way of Jesus. Every fiber of our being rebels against it. We don’t mind paying attention to poor people from time to time, but descending to a state of poverty and becoming poor with the poor – that we don’t want to do. And yet that is the way Jesus chose as the way to know God.”¹

Have you been looking for the Jesus that brings you more power, more fame, more wealth, more “success”? Have you, like the disciples, been disappointed when following Jesus does not lead to more worldly prosperity? Have you assumed that being a Christian meant you would have a more successful life in the eyes of your family or friends?

May we remember that Jesus saved the world by following the descending way, and he is calling each of us, in ways specific to each of us, to follow him in similar ways—ways of humility and love and service and sacrifice. We are called to live our lives in ways that might seem backwards to the world. In the midst of the struggle such a life can be, we can remember that through the difficulties, we are truly following the *real* Jesus, the Savior of the world...

-Ask God to help you do whatever it takes to follow the real Jesus

-Ask for the strength to give up your own success and comfort to follow where Jesus leads on his “descending way”...

Day 5: Are You Willing to Find Him?

Jesus asked Mary Magdalene that day he rose from the grave, “Who is it you are looking for?” She had been focused on finding Jesus’ body and had missed seeing the living Jesus in front of her. This week we have talked about some of the ways we miss Jesus as well. Sometimes we miss Jesus because even good passions or desires become the focus of our lives in such a way that we miss the mark with all we seek to accomplish. Sometimes we miss Jesus by trying to do all the right things, following religious rituals to the tee and appearing holy to all—yet having no true relationship with Christ. Sometimes we miss Jesus by working so hard at the tasks in front of us, even tasks we feel called to—necessary tasks—and miss choosing what is better, spending time with our Savior. And sometimes we miss Jesus by looking for the wrong Jesus altogether, a Jesus who takes the ascending way and wants his followers to “succeed” and be happy in every aspect. But the Jesus we meet in Scripture takes the descending way and invites his disciples to follow...

Are you willing to find this Jesus, or would you prefer to keep seeking after other things?

The truth is that a relationship with Christ—a real, communicative, emotional, open relationship—is the only thing that truly brings fulfillment in our souls. But that relationship takes work on our parts. We must take time out of our schedules to spend with God. We must work at becoming deeper people who are able to hear God speak through spiritual disciplines like prayer, Sabbath, and Bible study. We must be willing to put aside things that would distract

¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Letters to Marc About Jesus* (New York, HarperCollins, 1998), 41-42.

us or hurt this relationship. And we must be willing to follow the road less traveled, the narrow path of service and humility and sacrifice, rather than seek to build our own prestige and power and popularity.

What is the primary hindrance to building the deep relationship with God that he desires to have with you?

What sin(s) might be holding you back from this relationship?

What habit(s) might be holding you back from this relationship?

What personal desires or ambitions might be holding you back from this relationship?

What good thing (such as a service or ministry) might be holding you back from this relationship?

What friends might be holding you back from this relationship?

Whatever might be holding you back, I invite you to take some time (however long it takes) and ask God to release you from the hold or sway that thing or person or activity or desire has on you. Ask him to flood your heart with a passion to know him and love him as he knows you and loves you. And ask him for the strength to take whatever steps you must, even radical steps, to being seeking what matters most and growing closer to him...

Huh? Week 5
Small Group Discussion Guide

Read John 20:1-18 together as a group.

Though Jesus was standing in front of her, Mary Magdalene couldn't see him. Ironically, she was looking for his dead body!

- What keeps you from seeing Jesus? What habits, sins, desires, or activities keep you from throwing yourself into the most important relationship you can have?
- What do you think it means to pursue a relationship with Jesus? What, specifically, do you think this entails?

Like Mary, we often miss the relationship with God we were intended to have because we are so busy. Perhaps we are even busy with good things, things that are commendable or even important. But when we busy ourselves to the point that we miss the thing that is *most* important, we have strayed off course.

- What has the tendency or the potential to keep you too busy, so that you miss the most important thing in life?

Read Luke 10:38-42 together as a group.

Martha was certainly busy with good things, working to be a good hostess to Jesus himself! Perhaps what she was doing truly needed to be done. And yet Jesus did not commend her, nor did he grant her request to tell her sister to help her. Instead, he told her that it was Mary who had chosen what was better. *She was not lifting a finger to serve Jesus, but she was taking time to stop and be with him, listening to him.*

- What does this tell us about what God desires from us?
- What is stopping you from choosing what is better every day, from following Mary's lead and sitting at Jesus' feet to talk to him and listen to him?

It seems our lives just fly by, doesn't it? Months and years pass, and so often we continually tell ourselves that eventually we'll fix that, or when such and such occur we will get around to being a better person. And our plans seem to slip through our fingers so often. Yet choosing what is better is so very simple. It's not even a matter of doing, but of stopping! It's a choice that in the midst of our lives we will not allow our relationship with Christ to slip through our fingers. We will stop and be with him every day...

- Spend some time in silence, giving each person a chance to talk to the Lord, to say whatever they need to say and hear whatever they need to hear.
- After a while of silence, spend some time praying for each other—lift each other up in this area, asking for God's help not to miss him in the midst of life but to choose what is better.