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Our Writer

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Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Beyond Question is dedicated to the memory of Eric's father, Jim Burtness (1928–2006), who taught at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, for more than forty years. Jim's inquisitive and questioning mind helped thousands of people understand more deeply what they believe to be true about faith and life.



Preface

The Book of Faith Initiative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) affirms the centrality of the Bible to Christian life and faith, while at the same time seeking to address the lack of biblical knowledge and engagement in many parts of our church.

The purpose of the Book of Faith Initiative is to increase biblical literacy and fluency for the sake of the world. The ELCA has made a commitment to encourage all members of congregations, from children to adults, to dig deeper into our book of faith, the Bible. The Book of Faith Initiative recommends a new model for our church: a grassroots approach embracing a common vision in which all are invited to open Scripture and join the conversation. Each community is encouraged to decide how the Book of Faith Initiative will become a vital part of its own ministry. Be sure to visit the Book of Faith Web site (www.bookoffaith.org) for other resources designed to bring the book of faith and the community of faith closer together.

As the language of the Bible becomes more and more our native tongue, it will continually shape how we think and speak about God, about the world, and about ourselves. As we immerse ourselves in Scripture, Christ, the incarnate Word of God and center of our faith, is birthed within us. The Bible tells the stories of people living their faith over the centuries and, through its demands and promises, forms us as a people of faith. We become renewed, enlivened, empowered, and transformed as God, through Scripture, forms hearts, minds, and conversations.

Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Beyond Question has been written to help you, in your own context, live into the commitments of the initiative and accomplish our common purpose. This book will engage you in an encounter with the living and active power of the Word of God. Each week the journey uses passages from Scripture to explore the questions of Jesus.

You can use *Book of Faith Lenten Journey: Beyond Question* on your own or with your family, a spiritual friend or small group, or your entire congregation. Related worship helps and sermon starters for midweek Lenten worship are available online at www.augsburgfortress.org. (Search for the title *Beyond Question*. Click on the title and then open the “Worship Helps” tab in the product description.)



Introduction

Welcome to *Beyond Question*, a transformative journey through Lent. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses questions to change the lives and deepen the discipleship of those who follow him. In this book of Lenten devotions, you are invited to open Scripture and encounter Jesus and his transformative questions.

Jesus does not ask questions to get simple answers from us or to give simple answers to us. In fact, Jesus only directly answers three of the 186 questions addressed to him in the Gospels and often answers a question with a question of his own. Nor is the task of the church to give simple answers to complex questions. Rather, it is to ask empowering questions that draw people into a deeper understanding of their own faith and discipleship. Jesus asks these kinds of questions—questions that reposition us, challenge our images of God and our place in the world, and present us with new and creative possibilities for transformation. He asks probing, realigning, transformative questions to change core convictions and motivate new behaviors.

The quality of the questions determines the quality of the answers. Limiting questions can only provide us with limited answers—the same old unhelpful answers that often just drag us down instead of draw us out. Jesus' empowering questions lead us to empowered answers. They shift our perspective to new and fresh ways of looking at and solving our problems or issues. These empowering questions affect the quality of our lives and deepen our faith and discipleship.

This book invites you on a journey into deeper discipleship as each week we focus on one key question of Jesus.

- What are you looking for? (Week One)
- Where is your faith? (Week Two)
- Who do you say that I am? (Week Three)

- What do you want me to do for you? (Week Four)
- Do you love me? (Week Five)
- How will you believe what I say? (Week Six)
- Whom are you looking for? (Week Seven)

These questions will encourage and challenge you to examine your priorities and faith, consider who Christ is, define and articulate your beliefs about faith and life, and grow as a faithful follower of Jesus.

Questions like “Who do you say that I am?” are not questions that call for quick and simple answers, so allow yourself to *live with the questions* on this journey. Some of Jesus’ questions may linger with you for days, weeks, years, or throughout the rest of your life. You might find you’re not ready to answer some of the questions at this time. Maybe one or two of the questions will trigger other questions for you. Consider keeping a journal as you ponder Jesus’ questions, pray about them, wrestle with them, contemplate answers, reconsider your responses, leave some questions for another time, discuss questions with others, and ask your own questions. Live with the questions of Jesus as you take this forty-day journey of transformation and discipleship.

Praying the Scriptures

Martin Luther’s barber, Peter, asked him how an ordinary person should pray. In response, Luther wrote *A Simple Way to Pray*, in which he encouraged Christians to pray in their own words, rather than reciting prayers they had memorized, and to trust the Holy Spirit to guide them.

Christians today typically have more experience with personal prayer than did the ordinary men and women of Luther’s day, who would have known only the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and a few other prayers heard at mass or taught for private devotion. Even for us, though, it is easy to feel uncomfortable and inadequate with our praying. Luther’s advice to Peter offers us a simple, concrete way to enter more deeply and personally into prayer. He suggested starting with a text—from Scripture, the catechism, or other devotional material such as hymns—and reading it in four ways:

- Read it as a schoolbook, reflecting upon what God is teaching you.
- Read it as a song or praise book, giving thanks to God for the gifts God gives or brings to your awareness.
- Read it as a penitential book, confessing to God your sins, your needs, and your weaknesses as they are revealed in your reflection.
- Turn the words into a short prayer you speak to God.

There are no right or wrong prayers in this approach. Luther's intent was that our hearts would be stirred and guided.

Luther's core conviction is that the Scriptures are not intended to fill our heads with interesting ideas, but to bring the transformative power of God's Word into our lives. Bible study and prayer belong together. Worship is also a part of this dynamic encounter. Christians through the ages have recognized that what we believe shapes how we worship and also that how we worship shapes what we believe. Both, in turn, guide how we behave. Over time, what we say, do, sing, hear, and experience in worship influences us and forms our faith. For this reason Luther did not stop with translating the Scriptures into German. He also translated the worship service into the language of the people. He incorporated congregational singing into the liturgy and composed new hymns to teach the Christian faith through song. You will notice references to songs or hymns woven into this Lenten journey.

As you embark on this forty-day journey with Scripture and the questions of Jesus, you are invited most of all to come and follow him:

- Come prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you and Christ to be with you.
- Come humbly, asking for the gifts of faith and renewal.
- Come mindfully, bringing to your study the gifts of reason, the tools of scholarship, and the insights of others.
- Come attentively, reading Scripture carefully and closely.
- Come collectively, in the context of faithful community, letting your own stories interact with the stories of the Bible.

- Come expectantly, listening for the voice of God working through the texts to inspire, shape, and enliven you individually and in your community of faith.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

A decorative border at the top of the page featuring a repeating pattern of geometric shapes and symbols, including squares, circles, plus signs, asterisks, and question marks, in shades of gray.

How to Use This Book

This forty-day Lenten journey explores many of the questions Jesus used to deepen discipleship. The journey will encourage you to think, pray, and reflect on how these questions might lead and guide you into new paths of discovery. You will come to ponder *why you believe what you believe*, and you will be both challenged and strengthened throughout this journey.

It will help if you pay close attention to what God is saying to you, asking of you, confirming in you, and working in you. This journey will get at the heart of what Jesus is asking, not just seeking simple answers, but wrestling with the questions and helping you exercise your faith through conversation and prayer. In this way, your personal discipleship will grow and deepen as you discover ways your faith can be affirmed and strengthened.

It is often easier to maintain a spiritual practice if you do it regularly, at the same time each day. For many people, morning, while the house is still quiet and before the busyness of the day begins, is a good time. Others will find that the noon hour or before bedtime serves well. If you are working through this book with a partner, a group, or as family devotions, you might gather in the morning or before or after a meal. Do whatever works for you to maintain a regular, daily encounter with God.

You will note that there are no readings for Sunday. The forty days of Lent traditionally exclude Sundays, the days we celebrate the resurrection of Christ.

Although this book is designed to be used during Lent, it can be used at any time of the year. If you pick a time other than Lent for your journey, it will still be best to walk day by day through the book. Each day's devotion offers rich resources for you to ponder. There is no need to rush, so feel free to slow down and take more than forty days with this material. It is better to complete the

journey at your own pace than to give it up partway through. Set a schedule that works for you, and be as consistent as you can.

The amount of time you spend in devotions each day is entirely up to you. Sometimes you may only have a few minutes. Sometimes you might find it fruitful to spend more than one day with a particular reflection, question, or quotation that stirs you. If one element speaks more deeply to you than others, spend time with it. Always go where there is fruit and discovery. Don't worry that the other elements don't touch your mind or heart that day. Go where Jesus is speaking to you and giving himself to you. Luther wrote, "If you pause here and let him do you good, that is if you believe that he benefits and helps you, then you really have it. The Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift."¹

The Daily Plan

Each day of the journey begins with a question that Jesus asked as a way to draw out what was in the heart of the hearer and deepen faith and discipleship. Following each question is a brief reflection intended to stir your own thinking and reflection. You may want to read through each question and reflection more than once, perhaps even reading these aloud so that you might hear the question and reflect on it, in addition to seeing it on the page. Let Jesus' question sink into your head and heart. Take time to ponder what Jesus is asking of you.

Following the daily reflection, you will find *Biblical Wisdom* and a brief passage from Scripture that relates to the meditation. It may be obvious to you how this second passage relates to the day's theme, or you may need to think about it for a while before you make the connection. Either way, read the Bible text slowly. Let it speak to you.

After this scriptural passage, you will find a *Transformative Thought*. This quotation from an author or speaker may lead you to think about the theme of the day in a different way or offer a word of encouragement on this transformative journey. Take time to dwell on this thought as well.

Next comes *Silence for Meditation*. You may already be steeped in a tradition of meditation involving getting centered, breathing slowly and deeply, focusing your attention, and taking time to be silent and listen. Or you may be uncomfortable with such practices. Just as public worship needs silence amid the prayer and song, so also does private devotion. So practice being still, listening within

the silence, and quieting your mind and body. Silence leaves room for the Spirit to live and breathe and have its being. Think of silence as a time of refreshment; a time of re-spiriting, if you will.

Once you feel yourself settling down, slowly take a second look at the daily meditation, the Bible passages, and the Transformative Thought. Note the words, thoughts, images, and feelings that draw you. Explore meanings and implications for your life. Jot down any insights that occur to you. Do the readings raise additional questions for you? Do they suggest some action or response on your part? Write them down or discuss them with a devotional partner. Stay with the meditation time as long as it feels useful. When you are ready to move on, you might close your eyes, observe your breath for a minute, and thank God for the gifts of life and God's Word.

Then move on to the *Psalm Fragment*. The psalms are both our words to God and God's words to us. A mainstay of prayer for Jewish and Christian believers, they speak the deepest hope, joy, and pain of our lives. Read the Psalm Fragment silently or aloud, and reflect for a moment on how the psalm connects to the question of the day and moves you toward prayer.

In the section *Questions to Ponder* you will find questions related to the day's focus. These questions may be used for personal reflection, as a basis for conversation with others, or as journal prompts. Focus on the questions that draw you in and deepen your conversation with God and other people. Some questions may lead you to ask your own questions about faith and discipleship. Others may move you to further study or to some action steps. Go where the Spirit leads you.

The final section is *Prayer for Today*, which provides a brief prayer for ending your session. You might choose to repeat this prayer from time to time throughout the day. If you prefer, you can pray your own short prayer based on your time of reflection.



Keeping a Journal

Journaling as a spiritual practice can be profoundly transformative. It can keep you in touch with yourself and your response to God over time. Sometimes we really don't know or understand our thoughts and feelings until we write them down and see what we have written. We may be surprised at what is actually moving and happening in us. Then we can draw insight and consolation from what God is saying and doing.

Keeping a journal can also be a form of prayer, a powerful way of getting to know yourself—and God—more deeply. Journaling helps you focus and clarify your thoughts while keeping a record of your insights, questions, and prayers. It may lead you to thoughts and awareness that will surprise you. As you write, you can respond to God with your thanks and pleas, your joys and sorrows, offering them all to God.

Here are some hints for keeping a journal during this Lenten journey.

1. Write freely. Ignore your inner critic. Don't worry about grammar, literary style, whether you are writing in complete sentences, or what it sounds like. Just write! Simply get in touch with an idea, emotion, imagery, or memory and begin writing. Describe what you notice, how you feel, and how something is affecting you. From time to time, read back over your words to see more clearly what is happening.
2. Be honest with God. Do not censor yourself! Don't write what you think you're supposed to believe or feel or think. Don't write what you think is acceptable to your spouse or friends, your pastor, or your fourth-grade teacher. Write your real thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences as best you can identify them. When you are uncertain, write your confusion and questions. Your relationship with God will be as real and honest as you are.

3. Begin and end your journaling with prayer. Ask for insight to see God's work more clearly, to notice what is really going on beneath the surface of your days and thoughts. At the end, thank God for what guidance, wisdom, or consolation has come through your writing.
4. Feel free to address God directly in your writing. You may choose to write your entire journal entry as a prayer. Share what is happening to you and in you, what you are noticing in your journey with this book. Like the psalmists and Job, hold nothing back. You may be surprised by what bubbles out of you.
5. Because this is a transformative journey through Lent, look for ways your thoughts or behaviors begin to reflect a deeper life of discipleship. At least once a week consider including action steps that reflect your commitment to a closer walk with Jesus. An action step might be as simple as a commitment to beginning or ending each day with a prayer of gratitude.
6. Don't worry or stop if your journaling takes you in directions beyond the suggestions in this book. Go where you are led. Notice what you notice. The Holy Spirit will lead you to places where you may drink from the living waters Christ Jesus offers. The journaling ideas and Questions to Ponder are suggestions for your writing. Don't hesitate to move in other directions when promising avenues appear.
7. You may wish to carry this book and your notebook or journal with you every day during your journey (but keep them safe from prying eyes). Your Lenten journey can be an intense experience that does not stop when you close the book. When your mind and heart are stirred during the day, it is helpful to be able to write notes or new journal entries as they occur to you.



Journeying with Others

You can use this book (and I hope you do) with a friend, family member, small group, or congregation. If you wish, each person can first do his or her own reading, reflection, and writing in solitude. When you come together, you can share the insights you have gained from your time alone. Your discussion can focus on any of the elements of each day's journey.

Questions to Ponder is a natural place to start discussion with a group or spiritual friend. However, you might find that a section from a daily reflection, Biblical Wisdom, or a Transformative Thought has particularly stirred one of you. If so, start there, and let the discussion flow in the directions that are most fruitful for your needs and questions. Trust that God's word will bear good fruit in your conversation.

If you are working through the book with people you trust, you may feel comfortable sharing some of what you have written in your journal. But no one should ever be pressured to do that. It should be a ground rule that whatever is said in a small group stays within the group.

Always remember that your goal is to grow in relationship with Christ and the church, and in your understanding of God's word. You gather to learn from one another, not to argue or to prove that you are right and the other is wrong. Practice listening and trying to understand why your discussion partner or small-group members think as they do.

Sharing your experiences is a way of encouraging and guiding one another. It provides you opportunity to offer feedback gently and to help one another translate insight into action.

By all means, pray with others. This strengthens the spiritual bonds among those who take the journey together. Spend a few moments sharing prayer requests around the theme of the day. Then pray for one another and your faith community as you bring your time together to a close.



Week One

What Are You Looking For?

Day 1

What Are You Looking For?

Day 2

Who Touched Me?

Day 3

What Can You Give in Return for Your Life?

Day 4

Do You Wish to Go Away?

Day 5

Do You Want to Be Made Well?

Day 6

Whom Are You Looking For?



Day 1—Ash Wednesday

What Are You Looking For?

John 1:35-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?"

John 1:35-38a

Lent is a time of spiritual introspection. It's a time to pause in the midst of a very busy life, a challenging world, and a searching faith. Lent is a time to take a few moments regularly to think and reflect on Jesus, his journey to the cross, his death and resurrection, and what all of this means for our lives of faith.

Ash Wednesday is a time to pause, not to look forward to Easter and all the things that lie ahead, but to take things a bit more slowly and reflect on ourselves, our lives of faith, and the decisions we've made. Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance, turning from where we've been going and turning toward God. Ash Wednesday and Lent are the church's way of encouraging us to slow down, look at ourselves, and reflect on our faith and the meaning of our lives.

We begin this transformative journey through Lent with the first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of John. Interestingly, Jesus' first words are not "Follow me." Nor are they, "I am the bread of life." Jesus' first words in John's Gospel come in the form of a question: "What are you looking for?" This is the same kind of searching question as the first one God asks in Genesis. God knew that Adam and Eve were hiding yet still asked, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

What are you looking for? What are you looking for as you begin this journey through Lent? How would you like this Lent to be different or more meaningful than previous Lenten seasons?

The ashes that many people receive on this day remind us that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. They remind us of our own frailty and utter dependence on God for life. Take time to pause this day and consider the cleansing and

renewal you need in areas of your life. As you do this, remember that Jesus is one who is looking for you.

Biblical Wisdom

When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 29:13-14a

Transformative Thought

We have to keep looking for the spiritual questions if we want spiritual answers.²

Henri Nouwen

Silence for Meditation

Psalms Fragment

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

Psalms 139:1

Questions to Ponder

- What are you looking for as you begin this journey through Lent? Where and when will you take time to pause and think about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?
- If you received ashes on your forehead today or in the past, reflect on that experience. What areas of your life are in need of cleansing and renewal?

Prayer for Today

Gracious and loving God, be with me as I start this journey through Lent. Guide me into ways of deeper understanding and faith, that I might grow ever closer to you. Help me listen and help me grow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2—Thursday

Who Touched Me?

Luke 8:43-48

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?"

Luke 8:44-45a

The woman we read about in Luke 8 had a flow of blood for twelve years. Looking for healing, she had spent every last penny on doctors and treatments, but to no avail. Her condition just continued day after day, year after year. Can you imagine her frustration?

Even worse perhaps than her medical condition, her anemia, and her lack of energy, she was considered ritually unclean. This meant that anyone or anything she touched would become unclean, immediately contaminated. It was her religious duty to stay away from everyone and everything. She was socialized to believe that she was dirty, soiled, filthy, and untouchable.

What gave this person the courage to think her life could be different? Why didn't she just accept her place in life? Just who did this unclean, unworthy woman think she was?

Well, she was a child of God. And she had total confidence in Jesus' ability to change her life. She knew beyond a shadow of doubt that if she touched him, she would be made well.

She pressed through the crowds, this supposedly unclean, dirty, untouchable woman, passionate in the conviction that Jesus could bring her wholeness. She knew that Jesus was the answer to the questions she had been asking.

As she got near, she reached out and barely touched the fringe of Jesus' clothes. Immediately she was healed! Her flow of blood ceased. Her life was transformed.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked. And when she came, trembling and falling down before him, she declared before everyone that she had touched him and was immediately healed. Jesus blessed her and told her that her faith in him had made her well.

Who did this unclean woman think she was? She was a child of God with utter confidence in Jesus' ability to heal, restore, forgive, and give new life, even when all of this seemed impossible.

Who was this unclean woman? Perhaps she was like you and me, each of us on this journey through Lent, seeking to come close and touch Jesus and receive the amazing healing and new life that only he can give.

Biblical Wisdom

That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Acts 10:37-38

Transformative Thought

Dear Child of God, I write these words because we all experience sadness, we all come at times to despair, and we all lose hope that the suffering in our lives and in the world will ever end. I want to share with you my faith and my understanding that this suffering can be transformed and redeemed. There is no such thing as a totally hopeless case. Our God is an expert at dealing with chaos, with brokenness, with all the worst that we can imagine. God created order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos, and God can do so always, can do so now—in our personal lives and in our lives as nations, globally. . . . Indeed, God is transforming the world now—through us—because God loves us.³

Desmond Tutu

Silence for Meditation

Psalm Fragment

The LORD sustains them on their sickbed; in their illness you heal all their infirmities.

Psalm 41:3

Questions to Ponder

- Think about a time you or someone you know experienced physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. What was that like?
- In Jesus' time some people were considered "unclean" or "unworthy." Although these labels aren't often used today, there are people who feel unclean or unworthy of Jesus' touch. What might you do to help someone like that?

Prayer for Today

Almighty and merciful God, reach into the depths of my heart and find those places where I feel unworthy or unclean. Bring me closer to you and touch me with your love, grace, and healing. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3—Friday

What Can You Give in Return for Your Life?

Mark 8:34-37

"For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Mark 8:36-37

Wouldn't it be tragic to climb the ladder of success only to realize, when you reached the top rung of that ladder, that it was leaned up against the wrong wall? Today's question from Jesus is about the deeper purpose or meaning of life and what God might want to do in and through you.

On Ash Wednesday we considered the question "What are you looking for?" As a pastor, I've found that many of us are looking for success, stability, relationships, health, and so on. But I've also found that deep down most of us are looking for a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives.

Most people approach life in one of three ways. The first approach might be called *survival*. Many people around the world live in survival mode, due to hunger, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, underemployment, or illness. Others in survival mode go to work, punch the clock, put in their time, and live

for the weekend. Instead of saying, “Good morning, Lord,” when they wake up each day, they say, “Good Lord, it’s morning.”

A second way we might approach life is *success*. In success mode, people work hard at succeeding at work, at home, or at school. They also live with the constant fear of failure and the nagging worry that no amount of success will ever be enough to be deeply satisfying.

A third approach is to live with *significance*. In this mode, you are becoming the person God created you to be and making a significant contribution in the lives of those around you and in the world. You know you are a child of the Most High God who knit you together in your mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13). This God created you not merely to survive or succeed in the world’s eyes, but to live a life of significance in relationship with God, others, and the world.

Success can be great. But it can also be fleeting. Jesus’ question is an urgent call to not give up our lives in the pursuit of things that do not last. True significance comes from giving all that you are and all that you have to the care of Jesus, who loves you and wants you to grow in faith and know him more and more each day.

Biblical Wisdom

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

Transformative Thought

Jesus came to announce to us that an identity based on success, popularity, and power is a false identity—an illusion! Loudly and clearly he says: “You are not what the world makes you; but you are children of God.”⁴

Henri J. M. Nouwen

Silence for Meditation

Psalm Fragment

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Psalm 139:13

Questions to Ponder

- Which approach to life do you find yourself using most frequently: survival, success, or significance? How do you feel about this? What might you need to forfeit or give up to move toward living with significance?
- Consider saying this to yourself each day during this Lenten journey: *I am a child of God. I belong to God, believe in God, and will become the person God created me to be.*

Prayer for Today

Gracious God, you created me and all that exists, and have given me all things necessary for life. Thank you. Show me how to use my gifts to serve others nearby and around the world who are struggling to survive. Help me give all that I am and all that I have to you. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 4—Saturday

Do You Wish to Go Away?

John 6:51-69

Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

John 6:67

One day Alice was walking along when she came to a fork in the road. While she was pondering which way to go, she saw the Cheshire Cat in a tree. "Which path should I take?" she asked. The Cheshire Cat replied, "That depends on where you want to go." Alice said, "I don't quite know where I want to go." The Cheshire Cat responded, "Then it doesn't matter which path you take."⁵

Today's question from Jesus comes at a turning point, a fork in the road, for those who are following him. Opposition to Jesus is beginning to escalate by this time in John's Gospel. And rather than just healing and performing miracles,

Jesus is now talking about sacrifice and “the hour” of his death. Then he says, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (John 6:56).

The people following Jesus don’t know if they want to go where he is now leading them. So they say, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” (John 6:60). Something they don’t like is beginning to happen. Jesus is starting down a path they are pretty sure they don’t want to take. The Gospel reports that many people decided to turn back at this point.

“Do you also wish to go away?” Jesus then asks his twelve closest followers. And Peter replies, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69).

Not all paths lead to the same destination, so it matters a great deal which ones you take. Maybe you are at a fork in the road and, for the first time in your life, want to truly follow Jesus wherever he goes. Maybe you have been on this path but experienced discipleship burnout or dropout somewhere along the way. Perhaps you are on a long-term break from faith, from church, or from following Jesus, because it just got too difficult or unfulfilling. Wherever you have been, wherever you are now, Jesus, the Holy One of God, calls you to follow him and to keep following—all the way to the cross.

Biblical Wisdom

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1

Transformative Thought

Go where thou wilt, seek what thou wilt, and thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the holy Cross.⁶

Thomas à Kempis

Silence for Meditation

Psalm Fragment

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 119:105

Questions to Ponder

- Think back on a time you were lost, on the circumstances, how you felt, and how you finally found your way. What did you learn from this experience?
- Many people decided to turn back rather than continue on with Jesus. What holds you back from following Jesus, no matter where the path leads? What helps you stay on this path?

Prayer for Today

Holy God, our strength and our redeemer, by your Spirit hold us forever, that through your grace we may worship you and faithfully serve you, follow you and joyfully find you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.⁷

Day 5—Monday

Do You Want to Be Made Well?

John 5:2-9a

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

John 5:5-6

Susan had hit bottom.

Her life was a mess. She just couldn't give up drinking. She craved alcohol from the moment she woke up until she passed out at night.

Day after day the cycle continued and worsened. She started hiding a bottle under the front seat of her car. She started missing work because she was too hung over to show up. As time went on, she lost her job, which resulted in more drinking. Her husband, sick and tired of her drinking and inability to quit, divorced her. Susan drove home after a party one evening and was arrested for driving under the influence. She lost custody of her children. With no income,

she started forging checks. After she was arrested for check fraud, Susan realized she had hit bottom but was still digging.

In her growing despair, Susan asked herself, “Why can’t I quit drinking? Why is this happening to me? Why don’t people just leave me alone?” Finally she realized that those dead-end questions weren’t getting her anywhere.

So she started asking herself, “What can I do to avoid drinking this morning? This afternoon? This evening? How can I keep sober, just one day at a time?” After several failed attempts, she managed one day of recovery. Then two. Then a week. She went to ninety Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in ninety days. Finally, she was able to turn her will and her life over to God’s care. With God’s help, the downward spiral of her life was reversed. Susan’s entire life started to change for the better.

Susan changed her questions. By changing her questions, she changed her life. One day at a time.

“Do you want to be made well?” The answer seems so obvious to us; why would Jesus even bother to ask? The man had been ill for a long time, in fact, very ill for thirty-eight years. But Jesus asked the question and started a conversation with the man. And more than physical healing, the man received wholeness and restoration too.

Truth be told, each of us is wounded and in need of healing in some way. Do you want to be made well? Jesus can provide strength and healing—and even more—to overcome your wounds.

Biblical Wisdom

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

Transformative Thought

I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes.⁸

Bill Wilson

Silence for Meditation

Psalm Fragment

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

Questions to Ponder

- What kind of questions do you ask yourself that immobilize you or don't lead you anywhere? What kinds of questions can you ask yourself that will have positive results in your life?
- In what ways do you want Jesus to make you well?

Prayer for Today

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.⁹

Day 6—Tuesday

Whom Are You Looking For?

John 18:1-8

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?"

John 18:2-4

We began this Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday with the first words that Jesus speaks in John's Gospel, "What are you looking for?" We end our first week with the last words Jesus speaks before his betrayal and arrest.

What are you looking for? *Whom* are you looking for? Between those two questions lies Jesus' entire public ministry in the Gospel of John. They are the bookends for Jesus' ministry in the Gospel, and the bookends of our first week.

Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas arrived with a detachment of soldiers and police carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus stepped forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” They said, “Jesus of Nazareth,” and he replied, “I am he.” They stepped back and fell to the ground at his response. He asked a second time, “Whom are you looking for?” After this they arrested him, bound him, and brought him to trial.

The question “Whom are you looking for?” brought him death.

A few days later, Mary went to the tomb of Jesus. Devastated after his crucifixion and death, tears were streaming down her face. She wasn’t able to see or recognize Jesus, now raised from the dead. She had no idea that the one standing right in front of her was exactly the one she was looking for. Jesus asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” (John 20:15). When he spoke her name, she recognized him, and her tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy.

The question “Whom are you looking for?” brought her life.

Lent is a time to pause and turn and face Jesus, who calls you by name and invites you into a deeper relationship with him. Whom are you looking for?

Biblical Wisdom

From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul.

Deuteronomy 4:29

Transformative Thought

I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not “How am I to find God?” but “How am I to let myself be found by him?” The question is not “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let myself be known by God?” And, finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” but “How am I to let myself be loved by God?” God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.¹⁰

Henri J. M. Nouwen

Silence for Meditation

Psalm Fragment

For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Psalm 56:13

Questions to Ponder

- What do you think about Jesus' questioning of the soldiers and police in the Garden of Gethsemane? Who was in charge there?
- What or who did you look for in the past? What or who are you looking for now?

Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, you call me by name and invite me into a deeper relationship with you. Guide me and teach me on this walk with you. In your holy name. Amen.



Week Two

Where Is Your Faith?

Day 7

Where Is Your Faith?

Day 8

Didn't Anyone Else Return to Give Thanks?

Day 9

Do You Believe That I Am Able to Do This?

Day 10

Did You Not Know That I Must Be in My Father's House?

Day 11

Why Do You See the Speck in Your Neighbor's Eye?

Day 12

How Much Longer Must I Put Up with You?



Day 7—Wednesday

Where Is Your Faith?

Luke 8:22-25

A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?”

Luke 8:23b-25a

A friend of mine took a series of classes to learn how to drive Indy race cars. Really fast race cars. The instructor told him, “The most important thing for you to remember is how to come out of a skid when you’re driving 150 miles an hour. When they start to skid, most people focus on what they fear most—crashing into the wall. Instead, you must focus on where you want to go.” In a race-car skid, focusing on the problem doesn’t help at all. Focusing on the solution guides you through a skid, because what you focus on is often where you’ll end up.

Jesus’ disciples were in a “boat skid,” traveling across a lake during a huge storm. Terrified and in danger of sinking, they were focused on the wind and the waves. After they woke up Jesus, he spoke to the wind and waves, and they calmed down. Then Jesus asked the disciples, “Where is your faith?”

Many of us travel through life at 150 miles an hour, or at least it sometimes feels like that. At that speed, it’s inevitable that we’re going to skid at some point in our lives. And when we do, we ask questions like: “Why is this happening to me?” “Why can’t I get my life together?” “Why don’t my good intentions ever work out?” “Why can’t I catch a break, just for once?” Instead of putting our faith in Jesus, we look for quick and easy solutions that don’t help at all.

As the driving instructor said, stay focused on where you want to go. Always look to Jesus. Keep your eyes on him through the storms and skids of life. Put your faith in the one who will pull you through.

Biblical Wisdom

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest."*

Matthew 11:28

Transformative Thought

The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call "ourselves," to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be "good."¹¹

C. S. Lewis

Silence for Meditation

Psalms Fragment

He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Psalms 107:29

Questions to Ponder

- Think about a difficult situation in your life that had a positive outcome. What or who pulled you through that difficult time?
- What or who do you rely on most? Where do you put your faith?

Prayer for Today

God of power and might, calm my storms, calm my mind, and calm my spirit. Let me find rest in you. Ease my anxiety, and let me simply "be." Let me rest peacefully in your arms. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.