

Today

July/August 2024

refresh, refocus, renew

SLEEP AND DREAMS IN THE BIBLE

ALSO: QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED

Dear Friends:

Sleep is an important part of human life, and the Bible mentions it many times. In the month of July, I have taken the opportunity to reflect on what the Bible says about sleep, as well as the dreams that often accompany sleep. Though we may think of sleep as “downtime,” with nothing much going on, we discover in the Bible that our sleep can reveal something about our trust in God. Moreover, dreams, though often confusing, are an important means that God used in the Bible to reveal and move forward his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, who also needed to sleep. Reflecting on sleep and dreams in the Bible can help us better understand ourselves and give us comfort, knowing that God loves and cares for us always, even when we’re asleep.



As many teachers know, the best way to help students learn is to ask questions. In his ministry, Jesus, the master Teacher, asked his listeners more than 300 questions. In the month of August, Pastor Beth Fellingner explores many of the questions Jesus asked. Jesus’ questions challenge us still today to think carefully about living for and serving God in our daily lives. Focusing on Jesus’ questions can spur us on to live faithfully for the Lord who gives us new life.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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**“Sleep and Dreams
in the Bible”
Kurt Selles**



**“Questions Jesus Asked”
Beth Fellingner**

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**ReFrame
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Sleep and Dreams in the Bible

july

Kurt Selles

The Bible mentions sleep many times throughout its pages. It also talks about dreams—and while they can often be confusing, there are times when God speaks to individuals in dreams (which can also include visions). When he does that, God often reveals something about his plan of salvation—pointing to the Savior, Jesus Christ, who became human like us and also needed sleep. In reflecting on sleep and dreams in the Bible, may we better understand who we are as God's creatures, knowing that his love for us continues always.

Kurt Selles is director of ReFrame Ministries, which publishes these devotions. Kurt has served as a missionary in Taiwan and China, and he has also taught missions. Kurt and his wife, Vicki, have three adult children.

Questions Jesus Asked

august

Beth Fellingner

Jesus posed more than 300 questions during his teaching ministry, and here we will look at 31. Jesus asked questions that were profound, curious, open-ended, and challenging. Jesus wanted us to think carefully about living for and serving God in this world. And he directly answered only a handful of the questions he asked. May these reflections on Jesus' questions spur us on to live faithfully for the Lord who came so that we can have life.

Pastor Beth Fellingner has more than 40 years of experience in pastoral ministry. She and her husband, Barry, have created a missional community in their neighborhood called the Ugly Couch Café, where they serve coffee at a blue picnic table in their front yard, pray with neighbors, and host faith gatherings on a weekly basis.

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

*"What about you?" [Jesus] asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." —Mark 8:29*

When we meet people and get to know them a bit, it's not unusual to ask each other about work or hobbies or other interests. We look for information to learn about others and to see what we might have in common.

It would be rare, though, to hear a question like this one that Jesus asked: "Who do you say I am?" And yet this is one of Jesus' most important questions because it focuses on his identity and purpose.

Jesus asks this question of each of us too. And it is not an easy question. It takes deep thought and reflection because our response will reveal how we go about our everyday life and in whom (or what) we believe and have faith.

Peter answered Jesus by saying, "You are the Messiah"—that is, the Christ, the Son of God, who came to save us from

sin and death. And if we say the same, we declare that our faith and life are grounded in Jesus Christ. This affects how we pray, how we interact with others—how we live our whole lives. It also directs us to find peace and security in the Lord who loves us and has this world in his hands.

If we merely think that *maybe* Jesus is the Messiah, that will affect our lives too, and our foundation will feel less secure. Hopefully it will prompt us to ask Jesus himself, "How do you want me to live?"

As we begin this month of reflecting on Jesus' questions, who do you say Jesus is?

Jesus, give us the courage today to say that you are the Lord and Savior and to show in our lives that we believe it. Amen.

WHICH OF THESE WAS A NEIGHBOR?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”
—Luke 10:27

When we moved into our house 12 years ago, there were only five other houses on the street and a lot of empty lots where new homes would be built. We imagined what the houses and neighbors would look like—and now, with almost 100 houses on our street alone, we have made friends with many of our neighbors.

Along the way we decided to become “muffin people,” delivering those treats to about a dozen houses nearby. We introduced ourselves without thinking who might be behind the door except that they were neighbors. We began a soup and buns night with neighbors too, learned their stories, and shared life with them. It may have cost us a bit, but the reward of sharing experiences has been life changing.

The parable of the good Samaritan offers a picture of what Jesus was trying to show a religious leader who wanted to test him. It is about risk and relationship with people who are not identical to us. It is about seeing the one that Jesus has placed in front of us and becoming involved in their story. It is about addressing hurts and loneliness because that is what Jesus is asking us to do. It is about paying attention to the needs of people around us and not stepping aside or walking by, thinking that someone else can take care of them.

Who is your neighbor?

Lord, open our eyes and hearts to all the people whom you have given us to be our neighbors. Help us to see and share your love for all. Amen.

DIDN'T YOU KNOW?

When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.
—Luke 2:45

When our son was five years old, we visited my mother-in-law, who lived across the street from the Niagara River. There were no barriers to prevent children from wandering to the riverside—there was just the street, the riverbank, and then open water.

We could see Brandon's shoes, but no Brandon. We called his name, probably yelling, but heard no answer. We walked along in panic and saw nothing but the current. After an hour we were joined by neighbors, who circled the block and went further into the local village. Still no Brandon. In total fear, my husband picked up the phone and called the police. As he described what our son looked like, a small figure walked out from the bedroom behind him. Brandon explained that he was hiding from his sister. We weren't so sure it was the

best explanation, but our hearts were relieved, and we stopped worrying.

I suspect Mary and Joseph had that same sense of panic. Jesus was already 12 years old then, but he wasn't answering either. When they found him in the temple, his answer was a question: Didn't they know that he needed to be there, about his Father's business?

On days when Jesus may feel distant, we can be assured that he is still doing the will of his Father. Look for him, and you will find him—and he might have a question for you.

Dear God, when we are distracted and missing you, help us to refocus and realize that you are where you need to be. Keep us in tune with you, we pray. Amen.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

"We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

—John 1:41

Our Bible reading today begins with an announcement from John the Baptist saying, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

That was quite an announcement! God's people had been waiting for the promised Messiah for a long time—hundreds of years. Could this be the deliverer God had promised through his prophets so long ago?

John heard a voice from heaven describing Jesus as "God's Chosen One," so he shared that news with everyone who could hear him that day. Then, the next day, two of John's disciples who heard this message left to follow after Jesus. Would he be the one to fulfill their souls' deepest longings?

As they began to follow him, Jesus turned around and asked, "What do you want?" They

seemed a little tongue-tied but managed to ask where Jesus was staying. They were not so much concerned about location but about abiding with him, wherever he might go. He said, "Come and see."

Could they be welcomed into his life, his journey, his story? Jesus' invitation brought them into relationship, and what they were looking for was fulfilled enough for them to invite someone else, and then others, and so on.

Today, come and see.

Jesus, thank you for inviting us into your story. May we learn from you and follow you faithfully. Help us to accept your invitation to grace, sharing the good news that you are the Lamb of God. Amen.

WHY DO YOU INVOLVE ME?

[Jesus'] mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

—John 2:5

While my grandson was out shopping with me, he decided that I needed two new plants: a lemon tree and a prayer plant. He carefully chose both and placed them in the cart.

My own grandmother had grown lemons, so I thought, "Why not?" I now have both the lemon tree and the prayer plant in my office. The lemon tree eventually started to flower, and now it is beginning to bear fruit. One lemon has been the star of the show and is now the size of an apple. For a long time, the lemon was bright green, so I heard a lot of comments that maybe I had a lime tree. But now the yellow color is beginning to show. Maybe in a few more weeks we'll have a lemon pie worth making a party for.

In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, celebrations were important, and weddings were often

lavish events. No one would want to see a failed wedding party. However, in this case the wine had run out, and Jesus' mother, Mary, knew the best solution to the problem. She knew that Jesus could solve this. And she didn't look for other options.

How often don't we also know whom to turn to—and yet we often look for other solutions first? Today, as Mary suggested, we should do whatever Jesus tells us to. Are we ready to involve him? What might the possibilities be?

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving people so much that you step into our lives. Thank you for your compassion and care. May we always call on you first, and may you be glorified. Amen.

WHO TOUCHED MY CLOTHES?

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He . . . asked, "Who touched my clothes?" —Mark 5:30

I don't know about your family, but ours has a few pranksters. One game they love to play is to walk up behind someone and tap their shoulder from the opposite side and pretend it wasn't them. Maybe you have had someone do that to you too.

For the woman who had been sick for 12 years, she knew that her only hope would be to touch Jesus. She thought, "If I just touch his cloak, no one will notice, and yet it will be enough to make me well." She had incredible faith.

Jesus knew when she touched him because he felt the healing power flow out from him. So he asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

In the midst of our worst circumstances, when we have given up hope or tried everything, this story reminds us that

reaching out to Jesus gets his attention. He is not asking us to get everything in our lives cleaned up first. He is present at all times.

Jesus is also waiting for us to admit that we need him. He knows each one of us, and even in a crowd he knows when we reach out for him.

Are you ready for a conversation with Jesus today?

Thank you, Lord, for being there for me. Thank you that you know when I reach out to you. Thank you for your healing power. Amen.

WILL YOU GIVE ME A DRINK?

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"
—John 4:7

Often when I invite someone into my home, I'll ask if they would like a drink. Coffee, tea, water, perhaps? It would be rare, though, for someone to come in and ask for a drink—unless it was very hot outside or the visitor was a grandchild.

Jesus' request for water was also unusual. Not only was he not supposed to talk to a Samaritan woman, but he was a guest at the well where she had come to draw water. She had also come alone at the hottest time of day, probably to avoid judgmental eyes and gossip.

And there Jesus met her and reached out to her. It began with a question that led into a conversation in which Jesus declared who he really was. Jesus also knew the woman's life story before inviting her into his story. Jesus always invites. He does not demand but, rather, chooses to connect with

each one of us just as he did with the Samaritan woman.

In the places where you go to step away from others, Jesus is waiting with a question: "Will you join me in a conversation about your life and where you would like it to go?" What question would you like to ask Jesus? What are the circumstances that may have brought you to this place?

When the woman came to the well, she was expecting only to get a jar of water. Instead she received living water (hope in the Messiah) that would fill her soul and change both her and her community (vv. 28-42). What is Jesus asking of you today?

Jesus, thank you for your living water and for listening to us. Fill our hearts to overflowing with your love. Amen.

WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID?

He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.
—Matthew 8:26

This past year I was privileged to be on a wonderful mission trip to the small town of Mahdia in Guyana. I became a little fearful one day, though, when I saw a tarantula hanging on the wall of an outhouse. I was incredibly thankful for a pastor who knew how to bring calm into that scary situation for me. He did it with a gracious smile on his face and a broom in his hand—and I still wonder what he was really thinking of this Canadian at that moment.

Jesus' disciples had been with him long enough to have watched him step in, heal the sick, provide food, and do other miracles. And yet there in a boat, in the midst of "a furious storm," fear showed up again. This storm was probably bigger than most of the storms these fishermen had seen over the years—and the moment of

panic set in. I sometimes wonder if they had forgotten who was in the boat with them, or if maybe they were just annoyed that he was sleeping.

Nevertheless, Jesus' question applies to us today just as it did to his first followers: If you know me, "why are you afraid?" In what difficulties do you hear him say, "Trust me in whatever you are facing, and see what I can do"?

God, forgive us when we walk in fear instead of faith. Thank you for being bigger than our fear. Help us to remember that even in the midst of the biggest storms, you, the Lord of all, are able to bring calm. Amen.

HOW MANY LOAVES DO YOU HAVE?

*“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”
When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”*

—Mark 6:38

When I am at our grandkids' home as they pile in after school, I watch them empty their backpacks and then head to the fridge or the cupboard. “I’m hungry,” they cry, and they go looking for a snack. Though there is plenty to satisfy them, they often seem to have trouble finding just the right thing. But after some suggestions from their parents, they figure it out.

The large crowd of people with Jesus had been with him the whole day. Jesus could see that all of these people following him were spiritually hungry and wanted something more. Even his disciples noticed, and they tried to convince Jesus to send them away. But Jesus responded by sending the disciples to see what was “in the cupboard.”

They found that they had a total of five loaves and two fish.

Jesus was satisfied with what they brought, and he instructed them to seat the crowd. I wonder what it was like to keep handing out pieces of fish and bread—so much that the leftovers filled 12 baskets!

When we give Jesus what we have, even though it seems small, he multiplies it. Jesus also includes us in his work, setting us on a mission. “Seek and you will find.” And in our shared search, together we find and together we share.

Perhaps today he is asking you what you might find—what are you willing to give so that it might be shared?

Jesus, thank you for asking the hard questions and inviting us into the solution. Help us to see and believe that you can do anything. Amen.

“IF YOU CAN”?

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"
—Mark 9:24

Around Christmastime last year, we decided that making memories was more important than gifts under the tree, so we booked a week of holidays with our grandkids and had a wonderful time. The problem was that the holiday week was in November, and when December came around, our grandson, with soulful eyes, said, “Grandma, there will still be presents under the tree, right?” I looked at him and winked, assuring him that I was still a Christmas fanatic. He was much relieved that I had given him hope.

In the commotion of our Bible story today, a father is desperate for his son to be well. The disciples aren't able to send an impure spirit out of him, and chaos erupts when they argue with the local religious leaders. As Jesus comes on the scene, the desperate father looks

to him for hope. And I wonder if there isn't a moment of sarcasm or a wink as Jesus responds, “If I can?”

Immediately the boy's father has renewed hope, and he pleads with Jesus to help him overcome his doubts. Jesus, the relational Savior, sends the spirit shrieking and restores the boy to his father.

Jesus also tells the disciples that sometimes hope and prayer need to go together. Today let's remember that with Jesus “everything is possible.”

Thank you, Jesus, that you can do all things. Thank you for the reminder and hope of this truth. Help us with our doubts and anxieties to trust you for the answers. Amen.

DO YOU SEE ANYTHING?

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.
—Mark 8:25

On a work trip recently, I lost my glasses. I think they are hanging on a cactus somewhere in Arizona. After my glasses disappeared, the last few days of the trip were a bit blurry, to say the least. I have since ordered new glasses, but in the meantime I am wearing an old pair. Not quite as blurry, but definitely not clear and sharp.

It's important to be honest. The blind man in our story today had the choice to tell Jesus the truth or to go through life seeing a blur. Because of the man's honesty, Jesus touched him a second time and brought him from blurry vision to clear sight. I bet he was beyond overwhelmed at what he could see.

There are times when we have been blinded by our circumstances, our pain, or all the distractions around us. A friend

may step in and invite us into a conversation with Jesus. If we accept the invitation, we may have an opportunity to be healed by Jesus.

What I love about this story is that Jesus asks, in effect, "What are you seeing?" Sometimes our healing can take place progressively rather than instantaneously. Jesus walks with us. He continues to engage in the conversation, and he asks for our honesty.

When we admit where we are in our circumstances, Jesus continues taking us from blurry sight to clarity. What do you see today?

Jesus, help us to be honest and to accept that you bring clarity. Show us your love for us and for others. Amen.

CAN YOUR WORRIES ADD A SINGLE MOMENT?

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” —Matthew 6:33

In my work I travel a lot throughout the year, and I have a suitcase that is just the right size for an overhead bin in an airplane. But that doesn't work so well if I am away for more than four days. I often need a different outfit each day, and what if I spill something on one of them? Or what if I need an extra shirt in case the weather is cooler? I have to pack it all just right so that the suitcase closes.

On these trips I also wonder about the places where I am going and who I will be meeting. In prayer I wonder about the encounters that will happen and what God might be wanting to teach me. What needs to go into the suitcase of my heart?

Jesus was pretty clear as he taught about life and our worries. I think he was saying, in effect, “Don't sweat the small

stuff. Pay attention to what is really important. When you put your focus on me and trust me, the rest will come together. I will be enough for you.”

Emotional baggage can be heavy, can't it? Whatever you might be stressing about, remember that God knows, God cares, and God loves you — and by his grace he will carry you. With God looking after us, we can pack light.

Thank you, God, that I don't need to worry because you have all the details in your hands. Thank you that you love me and know the plans you have for me. Help me to put down the day's anxiety for the peace you give freely. Amen.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET WELL?

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

—John 5:7

Do we sometimes hold back from accepting Jesus' transforming power in our lives? Have we become so used to struggling that we can't imagine things going another way? Sometimes the crutch we know is easier than the walk we haven't experienced, and that crutch can become a convenient excuse. It's often easier to rely on the ways we are familiar with, rather than trying a new way that means change and transformation.

When Jesus asks this man if he wants to be made well, he does not answer with a yes—only a reason why it can't happen. He's had 38 years of only seeing the story one way; the thought of anything else hasn't entered his thinking. But Jesus is offering so much more than this man can fathom or imagine.

When Jesus asks us this question, do we limit him on the basis of our experience, or do we have hope that he can do something more? When we are confronted with the question of change, of thinking bigger than we have imagined before, can we say yes?

When we begin to understand that the one asking the question is our Lord and Savior, our Creator, our healer, and our friend, who loves us and cares about the details of our lives, can we say anything but yes? Today is a day to imagine what the Lord can do if we don't hold back.

Lord Jesus, forgive us when we limit you to our own thoughts and ideas. Help us to see with your eyes and to say yes when you ask. Amen.

WHERE ARE THEY?

“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”
—John 8:7

The religious leaders tried to set a trap for Jesus. They wanted to be able to accuse him of breaking the law. If Jesus said the woman should not be executed, he would break the law of Moses. But if Jesus said the woman should be executed, that would break the law of the Romans, who said only a Roman judge could sentence someone to death. I have also wondered why the man who was involved with the woman wasn't brought before Jesus as well.

It didn't take long for a crowd to gather. People can easily be drawn into an intriguing story.

Jesus responded in a most unusual way. He bent down and began to write in the dirt. As he continued to write, curiosity built and the accusers demanded an answer. Jesus replied that anyone who was without sin could cast the first

stone. He went back to writing in the dirt. And, one by one, the accusers left.

I love the fact that Jesus cares more about us than that we keep all the rules.

As he stood alone with the woman, Jesus knew that he was the only one with a right to pick up a stone—and yet he chose forgiveness as he asked where her accusers were.

Today let's remember that Jesus chooses forgiveness for sinners.

Thank you, Jesus, for your love and your forgiveness. When we feel judgmental toward others, help us to remember that you have forgiven us all our sins. Help us to live as you call us to. Amen.

WHY DID YOU DOUBT?

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" —Matthew 14:31

What is the craziest thing you have ever done? I could mention a few things from my younger days, but let's leave that to the imagination.

How about in your life of faith? What is the craziest thing God has ever challenged you to do? Were you up for the challenge, or did you hear excuses in your head about why you couldn't possibly try? Did you jump in with both feet and find, to your surprise, that maybe it wasn't so impossible after all?

I wonder how big the smile was on Jesus' face when Peter said, "Lord, if it's you . . . tell me to come to you on the water." I love it that Peter was ready to test his faith even when things looked impossible. He stepped out of the boat looking at Jesus. And as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, his steps went in the right direction. Even with

little faith, his walk on water was possible. But when Peter looked around him and saw the wind and deep water, he became afraid and started to sink.

When Jesus asks for our trust, he knows there is a bigger story to be written. There are days when circumstances muddy the waters and the trust factor diminishes.

Perhaps today is a day to re-focus where you are looking. How can you keep your eyes on Jesus?

Lord, help me to trust you with my life. Will you help me to walk and keep walking toward you? I need your help to keep my eyes focused on you and to trust you in the midst of the impossible. Amen.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING MORE THAN OTHERS?

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:44-45

When someone hurts you or wrongs you, it's easy to think of revenge and wanting to “get even.”

Some people have lived a big part of their lives being the victim of someone else's cruelty. And it can be very hard to let go of that pain.

Loving someone whom we like is easy, but loving someone who has given us every reason not to like them is hard. Yet Jesus says that if we want to be like him, forgiveness is at the foundation of our Christian walk.

This is what grace is all about. God loved us so much when we were his enemies that he sent Jesus to renew and restore us to him (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:8-11). God has every right to reject us—and yet he keeps loving us fully.

What's more, God asks us to do the same to everyone around us. Grace is the standard that God sets, and if we as believers accept that grace, we are to live with grace and forgiveness toward all others. Jesus modeled that we are to love others regardless of nationality, personality, faith, or circumstance. Jesus challenges us to be the grace differential so that others may know that we too have been loved and forgiven.

Thank you, Lord, for your grace and your perfect example of loving us. Please help us to love everyone with your love, even when it is hard. Teach us to be more like you every day, we pray. Amen.

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?

*“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.
The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” —Mark 10:51*

When I am in my car alone, I often have conversations with God. It's the perfect time to talk out loud and express what is going on in my thoughts and my life. This is really easy as long as I am doing the talking. But when I go silent and listen, it's a different story. I hear the same question that Jesus asked Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?”

It seems like a straightforward question that I can answer easily. But, knowing about Jesus and how he calls us to live, I realize that I need to think carefully. Fulfilling a desire that is on my mind would be great—but what about that person I know who has not yet come to faith in Christ? Or what about that person who is suffering and needs healing? My list can be rather lengthy. And all of the things on my list are worth asking for.

Bartimeus believed in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David. He knew he was crying out to the Savior, and he was sure of his answer. And when he was healed, he left everything behind to follow Jesus.

As I write this, I realize that I too need to trust so fully in Jesus that I can see he is the one who is capable of doing anything. Sometimes I want the miracle more than I want the one performing it.

When Jesus asks us, “What do you want me to do for you?” may our trust in him clarify our answer. Then, like Bartimaeus, let us ask boldly.

Lord, have mercy on us. Hear our prayer. Thank you that you are indeed our Savior and Lord who cares for us. Amen.

WHY DO YOU LOOK AT THE SPECK?

"How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"

—Matthew 7:4

Jesus gives us an important reminder here.

How quick we can be to look outward and criticize others instead of looking inward to see our own faults.

Some examples of this are what we refer to today as conscious or unconscious bias. We tend to like what we are familiar with, and we tend not to like what we find to be different. And these things have a way of shaping our judgments about others.

We also tend to think that others would be happier if they were like us. But we don't take the time to think about what that says about us.

Jesus wants us to look inwardly and to see what our own faults are before we address the faults of others. It's not easy to admit we have blind spots, but

when we begin to see them, we have a new appreciation for others, and it is easier to show God's grace and love.

I wonder what our conversations might look like if we took the time to talk with one another, hear each other's stories, learn to care for one another, and discover that we might not be so different after all. Today is a good day to try clearing our own faults out of our lives.

Lord, teach me to appreciate the rich diversity you have created, and help me not to judge others based only on my perception. Help me to see my own blind spots, and forgive me when I have failed to offer your love and grace. Amen.

DOESN'T SHE . . . SEARCH CAREFULLY?

"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." —Luke 15:10

Over the years my family members have tried to help me remember where I put things. They really have. They have given me special keychains, electronic devices, and other things to help me locate my glasses, car keys, and so on. My husband now has a checklist for me as I leave the house. I have a friend who assures me she understands completely. Maybe some of you understand too.

Jesus' parables about lost things inspire me. When my glasses or keys seem to have grown legs and walked away from where I set them down, it often helps to try to think back on my steps and movements to find them. And, like the woman who found her lost coin, I celebrate too.

For her, the loss of a coin that was worth a day's wages was significant. She was deter-

mined to find it, and when she did, she wanted to celebrate with her friends and neighbors. In this story, like the other ones in Luke 15, Jesus is illustrating how important it is when one of his children, who has been lost, is found and can be brought back into his family. Even the angels sing and celebrate.

Jesus' story is a thoughtful reminder that no matter who you are or what your circumstances are today, there is a Savior who is looking for you and watching over you—always.

Thank you, God, for loving us so much that you come searching to find us when we are lost. Thank you for stories that help us understand your love for us. We are grateful. Amen.

DON'T YOU PUT A LAMP ON ITS STAND?

"If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

—Mark 4:23

Someone gifted me a very large flashlight, and I thought, "What a perfect thing to put in our guest room, just in case." My mom often comes to stay the night, and she uses that room. If she needs to get up in the dark, a big flashlight can be more helpful than a small nightlight.

One day, when I was cleaning that room, I picked up the flashlight and turned on the switch. But no light came on. Checking further, I found there were no batteries in the flashlight. It really would not have helped my mom or another guest that way.

I wonder if sometimes we are like that too. We want to be a light for the world, but our batteries are dead or missing, or we haven't plugged in our lamp. In this parable Jesus points out that we don't bring a lamp into a room in order to

cover it up. The lamp is there to brighten the room and to show us things that we need to pay attention to.

Charles Spurgeon, a great preacher in his day, once said, "The Bible is not the light of the world; it is the light of the church. But the world does not read the Bible; the world reads Christians! You are the light of the world."

Today, let your light shine. No more hiding. Be the lamp that illuminates Jesus to the world.

Thank you, Jesus, that you ask us to be your light. Please help us to shine the truth of your love and grace to the world you have called us to brighten up. Amen.

SHALL I COME AND HEAL HIM?

Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

—Matthew 8:13

I was asked to officiate at a funeral for a young man (age 37) who had died from a fentanyl overdose. He had been living on the street for years and was addicted to some pretty strong drugs. He also visited our church during the week and came for most of the worship services. When he wasn't high, he could carry on great conversations, and I learned so much of his story. Regardless of his state of mind, he had a phrase that he often used, and I repeated it at his funeral. He would say, "I am always safe in the arms of Jesus." Regardless of what was going on in his life, he had faith, knowing that Jesus offers grace.

In our Bible reading today, a Roman centurion also had faith in Jesus. And even though Jesus offered to go to the man's home, the centurion said that he knew Jesus could heal his

servant by just saying the word—and that's how the servant was healed. He knew that his servant was safe in the arms of Jesus, even from a distance. And Jesus praised the centurion for having more faith than anyone he had encountered in his ministry.

We too can have faith enough to ask Jesus for all we need. He is willing to come and help, regardless of where we are and what we need. In fact, he promises that he is always with us (Matthew 28:20), so we can trust that we are always safe in his arms.

Lord Jesus, help us to reach out in faith for your grace and help. Thank you that you listen and answer. Amen.

YOU DO NOT WANT TO LEAVE TOO, DO YOU?

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."
—John 6:68

Have you ever had a morning when you crawled wearily out of bed, stubbed your toe, burnt your toast, and had all kinds of other things go wrong? A day like that makes you want to go straight back to bed. Or maybe the circumstances are harder, and someone is telling you to hang on when you want to let go.

I wonder if Jesus' disciples felt in a way like that when a lot of people turned away from Jesus after he shared some hard but true teachings. I wonder how many times the disciples weren't quite sure what to do with Jesus. Was it embarrassing or confusing or overwhelming for them? Already fully committed to Jesus, they knew they couldn't give up or let go. Jesus, who was clearly the Son of God, had met the longings of their hearts—and even on the worst days they had expe-

rienced, they knew that traveling with Jesus was enough. When he asked, "Are you going to leave too?" Peter replied with words that confirmed what the disciples were feeling: "There's no one else to go to, and you are all we need."

On days when you feel like giving up, throwing in the towel, or walking away from your faith, where will you go? It is too much to walk away from the one who holds you close through his presence and his words. By his character he assures you that even on a bad day, he is there.

Jesus, only you "have the words of eternal life." Help me to search them out, understand them, and obey them, trusting in you as the Lord and Savior. Amen.

WHERE HAVE YOU PUT HIM?

"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." —John 11:4

I know what it is like to lose a brother too young. He had cancer, and it seemed that surgery would help—but then a complication arose, and surgery did not go as planned. The day did not turn out as we expected. He was put on life support so that we could have some time with him. We gathered at the hospital with him and asked God to intervene. We prayed for healing and anything else that would change the outcome. It did not, and the doctor who brought things to a close that day was kind and compassionate. We too wondered, "What if Jesus had been there . . . ?"

A few months later we learned that the doctor who was with us that day had come to faith because of the interaction with our family. Jesus had been at work there in ways we had not imagined, and the glory given to

God through this was evident. We had been able to share a hope beyond the walls of the hospital, trusting that eternity in Christ would be ours together, no matter what happened.

Martha believed with the same hope. Yet Jesus had another plan. With tears in his eyes, he asked where they had buried his friend Lazarus. When Lazarus came out of the tomb, I am sure that day wasn't what the people there expected either. The glory given to God was real, and many came to faith in Jesus that day.

Where will God be glorified in your story today?

God, be glorified in our lives. Whatever we may be facing, we thank you for your compassion and love. Fill us with hope, in Jesus' name. Amen.

IF IT WERE NOT SO, WOULD I HAVE TOLD YOU?

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." —John 14:6

Homelessness is a problem throughout our world. So many people live rough and feel that they have no future. Many have lost their space to the greed of others, and this becomes a bigger story every day. Conversations and action plans are initiated, but solutions are hard to achieve.

I wonder if Jesus' disciples were beginning to feel displaced as he talked about leaving them. Jesus had talked about his betrayal and about dying and going away (John 12-13). That probably made them confused and upset, because they didn't expect those things would happen to the Messiah, God's Anointed One, who had come to be the Savior. But there was a lot they didn't understand. What was going to happen next?

Jesus offered comfort by moving the conversation in a differ-

ent direction and focusing on living with him and the Father in heaven. This is something we should all pay attention to. With his question here, Jesus reminds his followers that there is a secure place for each of them in eternity with him. God's house is big, and it has many rooms.

This same promise is for us and for everyone we share Jesus' story with. God has prepared a place for all of us who believe in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life!

Jesus, thank you for your promise of sharing eternity with us and that you have a big house with room for all. Help us to walk faithfully with you into eternity. Amen.

WHO IS GREATER?

"The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." —Luke 22:26

Have you ever played "shotgun"? Usually it's about getting "the best" passenger seat in the car—in the front seat by the driver. Our kids believed it was the middle seat in the back of the car. I can still hear the arguments and the mad dash for that seat. I am thankful that children's car seats have taken away the mania of that game for my grandkids.

Our desire to be in first place can get in the way of how we respond to a situation. Can you imagine being at the Last Supper with Jesus and having an argument break out about who is the greatest? Had the disciples learned nothing from Jesus about service in God's kingdom?

Jesus patiently tried again. He told his disciples that they were not like kings and other worldly leaders who lorded it over others; instead, his followers

were citizens of heaven, where serving is more important than being served. He said, "I am among you as one who serves." And he assured them they would be able to eat and drink at the table in God's kingdom, but the time for that would come later.

As you reflect on this story, what is your posture? Do you need to be seen, or are you willing to open doors so that others will be treated in a way that brings glory to God?

Jesus, help us to remember that you set an example for us to follow. Guide us as we strive to follow you in attitude and posture. Thank you for your servant heart for us. Amen.

ARE YOU STILL SLEEPING?

*When [Jesus] came back, he again found them sleeping. . . .
They did not know what to say to him. —Mark 14:40*

You have had a full meal, and it has been a long day. In fact, the past several days have been really challenging—emotionally and physically. You are worn out and tired. Even in the cool night air, you can barely stay awake. You know you need to pay attention because Jesus has asked you to keep watch, but your eyelids are getting heavier by the moment. Soon your head bobs, and you are fast asleep.

You didn't plan it that way. Jesus nudges you awake and asks, "Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?" Startled, you hear him say, "Watch and pray. . . ." You nod in agreement, feeling horrible that you haven't managed to stay awake. He steps away, and the heaviness settles in again. Your eyelids close. Later he wakes you again, and you don't know what to say.

Then a third time you are awakened—and now there is a crowd coming. Sleep vanishes. You look at the one who asked you to pray, and he is in the hands of his enemies!

Though our lives today are much different from the disciples', the need for staying alert and praying is not. Our world is in need of our attention, and the Lord is calling us to stand watch. It is encouraging to know that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, praying for us (Romans 8:34), but today he still needs us to do the same for his world and for all God's children in it.

Lord, help us to be alert, watching and praying for your sake. Guide us to live faithfully, that all your children may come to know you. Amen.

WHO IS IT YOU WANT?

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" —John 18:4

Not long ago I received a call that a dear friend might have only hours—or a few days, at best—to live. I rearranged my day and left for the hospital. I should have asked for the room number ahead of time, but as I stood near the nurses' station, someone asked me whom I was looking for. She kindly directed me to the room—and after I walked in, I soon realized I was saying good-bye.

Jesus knew what would soon happen as he saw soldiers and officials coming for him. This was the plan ahead of him, and he faced it head-on. He even unnerved his pursuers by stepping forward and identifying himself. There was no fight from Jesus—just resolution that he was okay with accepting God's plan for him and for the world.

When God calls us and asks us to step into the plan he has designed for us, do we step away or step in? When everything feels safe, it's not hard to step in. When the storyline involves suffering or pain, however, it's easier to back up and hesitate. I admit that I have argued with God on occasion, telling him I didn't have time for his plan. I preferred a different way. That didn't change the plan, though, and when I took the posture of trusting over fighting, I appreciated the choice God took for me so that I could trust him then. Can you?

Dear Jesus, as the soldiers approached, looking for you, you stepped forward and faced them. Will you help us today to have the courage to accept the plan that you have designed for us? Amen.

WHO IS IT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR?

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

—John 20:16

There are times in life when we have to do some things we don't want to do. Tough things. There's that phone call we have to make. Or that task ahead of us that looks bigger than we bargained for. Or maybe we have received news that shatters our thinking, and we can't imagine how we can deal with the situation.

I am sure that is how Mary felt. Her heart was heavy with the news of Jesus' death. She knew that his body was placed in the tomb, and she and some others had wanted to make sure his body was prepared properly (Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-12). Imagine their surprise when the tomb was empty. How could this be?

After sharing the news with Jesus' disciples (John 20:1-2), Mary went back to the tomb and stood there. Her heart was

heavy, and the tears for her Lord trickled down her face. Someone else was there too. A gardener? Perhaps he might know something.

He said, "Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Then he spoke her name. And she knew it was Jesus. Her whole outlook changed. What a glorious encounter!

Whatever circumstances you are in and no matter what struggles you are facing, be assured that Jesus is with you (Matthew 28:20) and that he knows your name.

When we are distracted by tough circumstances in our lives, thank you for interrupting us, Lord, to call our name. Thank you for being there and reminding us how much you love us. Amen.

WHAT THINGS?

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” —Luke 24:32

At a concert, the usher at the door looked so familiar to me. But I could not recall where or when I might have met him before. After a brief conversation with him, we recalled that years ago he had been our son’s grade-8 teacher. We enjoyed sharing a few memories of that time in our lives.

I think the situation was slightly different as the two followers of Jesus walked along toward their home in Emmaus. They didn’t recognize that they were talking with Jesus, even though they had seen him recently. Did he not look the same? Jesus asked questions and taught them about the Scriptures, but it wasn’t till they sat and shared bread together that their eyes were opened to see him. What a wonderful feeling that must have been!

Then, after Jesus “disappeared from their sight,” they joyfully

made the long trip back to Jerusalem to share their story. They could not wait to share their experience. Their love for Jesus and the others was enough to propel them back to Jerusalem to share.

With a text message from my cell phone, we eagerly shared with our son that we had talked with his grade-8 teacher at the concert that night. And it was fun to share that with him.

Are we eager in a way like that to share with others about our times with Jesus?

Lord, thank you for moments when you meet with us in a fresh new way. Open our eyes and hearts to your work in our everyday lives, realizing you are closer than we might think. Amen.

HAVEN'T YOU ANY FISH?

Simon Peter . . . dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

—John 21:11

Years ago we lived on the edge of a lake in eastern Ontario. We often took our fishing poles out to see what might be swimming in the water. Some seasons were better than others, and we released many sunfish so that they could grow bigger. Some bass ended up in the frying pan, but we certainly were not experts.

The fishermen in today's story were experts. They didn't know who was calling out to them from the shore, but they knew what it was like to try fishing on the other side of the boat. Yet on this day they were not sure what to expect; they had been fishing all night and had caught nothing.

These men had also had a rough time lately. They had been following Jesus, the Messiah, but they were confused with the outcome. Jesus had died and risen again, but

Rome was still in control. What was the Messiah up to?

Then, after throwing their nets on the other side and getting so many fish that they couldn't haul the net in, something triggered in their minds: "It is the Lord!" (See Luke 5:1-11.) Eventually they dragged their overflowing net ashore, and it was not even torn. A reminder that God can do more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Today Jesus wants to remind us that he has called us to follow him too. What is Jesus up to in your life? In your neighborhood? Your community? Your area? Is he calling you to trust him again like you did when you first met him?

Lord, thank you for your abundant love as you keep calling us to love you and others. Amen.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord . . . you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

—John 21:17

Recently I recalled the day my husband asked me to marry him. We were both students and had come from different backgrounds. We talked about questions like "What is love?" and "How do we know if we're in love?" and "What would it look like if we decided to make this relationship permanent?" For me, coming from a long background of faith and solid examples of strong marriage made it easy for me to say that I loved him. For him, coming from a few years of faith and not so solid relationships made it harder to trust a longtime commitment. But we knew we had faith and a choice to try. And for over 44 years we have offered each other the best of ourselves.

Jesus' question to Peter was about deep commitment. And Peter was probably feeling a mix of emotions as he stood

on the beach facing Jesus that day. Peter had denied Jesus three times (John 18:17, 25-27), and yet there in front of him was the one who had defeated death. And now Jesus was asking the hard question: "Do you love me?" Of course Peter loved him, but Jesus wasn't asking for a simple relationship. He was asking Peter if he was ready, no matter what the cost, to bring the good news about him to people who hadn't heard it.

What is your answer to Jesus' question?

Lord, thank you for loving us. Help us today to love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to share the good news about you everywhere. Amen.



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