

Q ~ **Why are you so afraid?** *Mark 4:40*

Reflection

The fear that the disciples experienced was not imaginary. There was a real possibility that they could drown. Jesus was asleep as the wind and the waves tossed the small boat back and forth. Why wasn't Jesus more concerned?

Discussion Prompts

What role has fear played in your life? How do you know when you are afraid?

Do you know anyone who has overcome a fear? What lessons can you learn from them?

Prayer

Jesus, when things are bad it's easy to question whether or not you care. It's easy to see the wind and the waves and to forget you're in the boat too. Jesus, wake up and help. I want to rest in trust and to cast fear overboard, but I'm not there yet. Wake up, Jesus, and tame this terrible storm that threatens to swallow me whole. Jesus, I'm scared.

Digging Deeper

Make a list of what you are afraid of. Invite Jesus to speak "Peace, be still" into those things.

Invite some friends over for tea. Share how fear has taken root in your lives. Pray for each other and encourage each other.

Imagine yourself in the boat. As the waves and wind threaten, watch Jesus sleeping. Resist the temptation to wake him up with your fear and panic. Instead, lie next to Jesus and allow yourself to rest. Close your eyes and place your hand on his chest. Breathe slowly and deeply; match your rhythm to his.

Q ~ **What do you want me to do for you?** *Mark 10:36*

Reflection

In this passage we encounter a God who wants to hear our requests and even grant them. It's comforting to know that we can come to Jesus just as we are without fear of judgment from him. Sometimes the things we want are not good for us or good for those around us. We have to trust that Jesus knows our hearts and will answer our prayers according to his goodness, wisdom, and glory.

Discussion Prompts

What is the difference between wants and needs? Does Jesus sometimes grant us the things we not only need, but want?

If you could ask Jesus for anything and you know it would be granted without question, what would you ask for? Why?

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for being open to my request(s). With boldness, I speak honestly the desires that are on my heart, no matter how right or wrong they may be. I trust that you want the best for me and will answer my prayer accordingly. I acknowledge that my understanding is severely limited and that yours is not.

Digging Deeper

When the other disciples heard what James and John asked of Jesus, they were upset. Do you think the people you know would be upset if they knew your true desires?

Are you ever afraid to say what you really want? Why or why not? When is the last time you got in touch with your true dreams, desires, hopes, and passions?

Jesus uses James and John's request to teach them an important lesson about leadership. In light of what you know about the kingdom, take an objective view of your request (as if someone else had asked it). What lesson might Jesus teach you about the kingdom after hearing your request?

Q ~ Who do you say I am? *Mark 8:29*

Reflection

At this point, what others are saying about Jesus fades away. Jesus turns to you and asks you this question personally. Try speaking the name that naturally arises out of your heart.

Discussion Prompts

Reflect for a few minutes on your life and consider how God has been present to you. After reflecting, what is your response to this question in light of your experience of God?

Are you surprised by your answer? Why or why not?

Prayer

God, there are many names that describe who you are. Today, I speak out of my experience and use the name _____ to begin this conversation with you.

Digging Deeper

Search the book of Mark and make a list of the names that people call Jesus. Look over the list. What questions arise for you out of the list? Which ones do you resonate with? Which seem strange or foreign to you?

This question comes at the midpoint of Mark's gospel. What was Mark's intention in placing this story and this question here? What does it mean for you?

Immediately before this question, Mark tells a story about someone who experiences various stages of blindness and sight. Why does Mark put this story right before the conversation about the identity of Jesus?

Q ~ Do you want to get well? *John 5:6*

Reflection

Jesus' question to the paralyzed man seems odd. The answer is obvious, isn't it? Of course the paralyzed man wants to be well. But does he really? He has been paralyzed for 38 years. Sometimes being sick can become our "normal" way of life. Sickness can become part of our identity. We say we want to be well, but do we? What are the implications of leaving sickness behind and embracing wholeness and health?

Discussion Prompts

Are the man's reasons for struggling to get into the pool legit, or are they excuses?

The man said, "I have no one to help me." What role do other people play in the healing process? When does helping no longer "help?"

Prayer

Jesus, I've been unhealthy for so long that I've gotten used to it. It feels normal to me now. Give me insight into the areas of my life that are diseased and not working the way you intend. I have to admit that I've become content to live in a way that is less than full. It's because. . .

Digging Deeper

Do you want to get well? Why or why not? What are your reasons either way?

Is there a sickness that you've been carrying for a long time? How long? How have you been shaped by it?

Invite a friend out for coffee. Tell that friend about an area of your life that is diseased. Seek their counsel. Ask for prayer.

Sometimes our bodies fail. What other areas, besides the physical, could use some healing? Invite God into those areas.

Q ~ Do you believe that I am able to do this?

Matthew 9:28

Reflection

This is a simple story about two blind men who pursue Jesus, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." The title they use for Jesus here is important; they identify Jesus as the promised Messiah in the line of David. Jesus asks a poignant question, "Do you believe I am able to do this?" The two men have not asked for healing but for mercy. Therefore, what Jesus is asking is whether or not they believe he is able to show them mercy. In this instance, mercy flows from Jesus in the form of physical healing.

Discussion Prompts

We don't hear the word "mercy" much in our everyday vocabulary. What does mercy mean?

These two men are blind, but they are able to see Jesus clearly. Discuss what it means to "see" clearly with the heart, or to have spiritual 20/20 vision.

Prayer

Jesus, when our bodies don't work the way they are supposed to, it's so frustrating. You offer mercy, which sometimes takes the form of physical healing. Help me to desire mercy in whatever form it takes. It's easy to believe you are "able," but it's another matter altogether to believe that you are "willing." Give me the faith to believe that you are both. Give me grace to receive and celebrate your mercy in whatever form it takes.

Digging Deeper

What does it mean that God is merciful (mercy-full)? Invite the Spirit to use your imagination and picture God full of mercy. What do you see?

Why do you think the two blind men asked for mercy instead of physical healing?

Petition God, letting him know that you believe he is "able." Then, pour out your heart, asking God to act.

Q ~ **Why are you troubled?** *Luke 24:38*

Reflection

In this post-resurrection story, Jesus appears to his disciples. The disciples think they are seeing a ghost and are startled and scared. Jesus reassures them by showing them his hands and feet. Then he invites them to touch him and experience his "real-ness."

Discussion Prompts

What is troubling you right now?

Why might gazing upon the crucified/resurrected hands and feet of Jesus be the cure for troubled hearts and minds?

Prayer

Lord, I am surrounded by trouble. I feel scared. There is so much that is out of my control and I'm feeling anxious and worried. Give me the gift of experiencing you in a concrete way, because sometimes you feel like a ghost to me. I know you exist, but I wonder if you can make a real difference in this messed-up world. Come to me, Jesus, and let me not only see but feel your hands and feet.

Digging Deeper

The Bible is full of troubled people and troubling situations. Can you identify with a particular story or person?

Make a list of your troubles. Meet with a friend and pray together over each concern, placing each trouble into the resurrected, nailed-scarred hands of Jesus.

Jesus wants you to tell him what has your heart so stirred up with worry. Hold nothing back. In your imagination, sit with Jesus. After you've poured out your troubles, place your hand in his crucified/resurrected hand. Hold hands for a while and sit in the warm silence of his loving presence.

Q ~ Why do doubts arise in your mind(s)? *Luke 24:38*

Reflection

When Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection, they were filled with doubt. They couldn't believe that it was really him. He came to them in a resurrected body, with resurrection power. It wasn't the same Jesus they remembered.

Discussion Prompts

What doubts do you have? Have you ever voiced them? Why or why not?

Why might gazing upon the crucified/resurrected feet and hands of Jesus be the cure for troubled hearts and minds?

Prayer

Jesus, people who have no doubts about their faith or about your goodness seem a bit suspect to me. There is so much in this world that calls into question your love, power, and involvement. Thank you for taking my doubts seriously. Thank you for not being angry with me because I have doubts. Give me the strength and conviction to trust you without having to have all the answers to everything.

Digging Deeper

Make a list of your doubts. Are some more concerning/serious than others?

Rather than being afraid of your doubts, make friends with them. See them as companions on the journey. What helpful lessons are your doubts teaching you? What dangers are your doubts alerting you to? Share these discoveries with a good friend over coffee and a piece of pie.

Jesus, the one who has risen from the dead, asks the question about doubts using the word "arise." What is the significance of this? How do doubts arise? From where do they arise? Where does their power come from?

Q ~ **What do you want?** *John 1:38*

Reflection

The questions of Jesus get at the deepest desires of our hearts. Jesus turns and asks the two who are following him this simple yet multi-layered question.

Discussion Prompts

This is the first question that Jesus asks in the book of John. What is the significance of this?

Sometimes we feel more strongly about what we don't want. Why is it easier to know and share what we don't want rather than what we do want?

Prayer

Jesus, sometimes I know what I want so clearly. Sometimes I feel confused and lost. Sometimes I'm afraid to acknowledge what I really want because it's just too painful or I'm afraid of the implications. In reality, I want lots of things. . . but I hear your challenge to discover and name the WANT underneath the wants. It's hard work. Give me the tools, the support, and the strength to dig deep.

Digging Deeper

The two men following Jesus wanted to know where Jesus was staying. They wanted to abide with him—to be with him. Where is Jesus abiding today? In other words, where can you find Jesus?

They spent the day with Jesus. What do you think they did? What did they talk about? Try to get away for a day and spend it with Jesus. Meet a friend for coffee and share what it was like.

Is your deepest desire to be with Jesus? Why or why not?

Q ~ Do you understand what I have done for you?

John 13:12

Reflection

Jesus washes his disciples' feet, returns to his place around the table, and puts on his robe. Then he asks the disciples this profound question. It extends beyond the upper room to include the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb. It can even be taken back to the creation story in Genesis.

Discussion Prompts

What is the relationship between, power, leadership, identity, and service?

What is the modern equivalent of washing feet?

Prayer

*Jesus, at times I catch a glimpse of what you have done for me. But to say that I **understand** would be a lie. Thankfully, all it takes is a small glimpse to change my life forever and to live for you completely. One day I will understand fully all you have done, but until then transform me into a disciple seeking deepening levels of understanding. Open my heart, mind, ears, and eyes. As you do, may I respond with equal amounts of love and gratitude.*

Digging Deeper

Think of three specific things that God has done for you. Praise him. Then tell someone about God's goodness in your life.

A fitting response to God's generosity and goodness is gratitude. Hold a small "thanksgiving" gathering in the spring or summer. Have special food/desserts/drinks and share together what you are thankful for.

Rather than speaking your thanks, try to feel it. Don't give up until you feel gratitude stirring in your heart. What does it feel like? When is the last time you felt **deep** gratitude?

Q ~ Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? *Luke 6:46*

Reflection

This question comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It's fairly easy to say "Lord, Lord." The story from which the question comes is a warning about the discrepancy between words and actions.

Discussion Prompts

How closely do your words and actions align?

Take an honest assessment of your life. Based on your life alone (not your words), who or what is your “Lord”?

Prayer

Jesus, your question exposes the hypocrite that I am. I admit that I pick and choose certain teachings to implement in my life, usually the least painful and inconvenient ones. My actions and my words are often out of sync, but sometimes they do align, and for that I thank you. Your grace and power is at work in my life. Thank you for this question. It hurts, but the honesty and humility it produces are freeing.

Digging Deeper

Go back over the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). Identify one thing that Jesus said that you are not currently putting into practice. Why?

What would happen if you tried to put the Sermon on the Mount into practice? What would your life look like? How would people know?

Think about someone you know who has built their life on a firm foundation. Now think of someone who has built their life on sand. Meditate on the difference.

Q ~ Will you really lay down your life for me?
John 13:38

Reflection

Peter boldly proclaims that he will lay down his life for Jesus. But Jesus knows Peter better than Peter knows himself. Peter will one day be ready to *really* lay down his life for Jesus, but first he has a lot of growing to do. Rather than dying for Jesus, he will deny Jesus in a matter of hours.

Discussion Prompts

What does it mean to live for Jesus and die for Jesus at the same time?

Peter didn't know himself very well. How well do you know yourself? How far are you willing to go to follow Jesus?

Prayer

Jesus, you only ask of me what you yourself are willing to do. I know that you are willing to lay down your life for me, because you did. Help me to lay down my life for you in the small and ordinary circumstances of my life. Forgive me for the small and big ways I deny you every day. You are so faithful to me, Lord. Thank you!

Digging Deeper

Our lives are made up of moments and many small decisions. Try not to make this question epic. Rather, identify a simple, ordinary area of your life that you haven't "laid down" yet. What would happen if you let go and gave it over to Jesus?

Why is dying so scary?

Before Jesus was arrested, he struggled in the garden with laying down his life. What helped Jesus to trust and let go?

Q ~ Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? *Matthew 7:3*

Reflection

Jesus uses an exaggerated image to describe how the judging scenario often plays out. His question is an honest one that invites us to dig deep into our hearts to gain understanding into *why* we judge others while ignoring our own obvious yet blinding faults.

Discussion Prompts

Why is it easier to see other people's faults rather than our own?

Humbly share with the group the "plank(s)" in your eye.

Prayer

Oh Lord, free me from the need to judge others. I can be a harsh critic sometimes. You alone see clearly enough to judge. Not only that, you're a gracious and merciful judge. Help me to leave the judging up to you. As I journey with fellow pilgrims, give me the wisdom and humility to help others walk with increasing amounts of courage, surrender, faith, and joy.

Digging Deeper

How do you balance accountability and speaking honestly to other believers without judging them?

How does judging others create a shaky foundation on which to build your life? (see Matthew 7:24-27).

This will be hard to do, but ask a friend to tell you some of your "growth areas." Attentively listen with curiosity. Thank your friend for loving you enough to tell you the truth from where they stand. Ask the Lord to change you and for the grace to humbly laugh at your shortcomings.

Q ~ **Who is it you want?** *John 18:4,7*

Reflection

A mob consisting of soldiers, religious officials, and a disciple (Judas), came to the garden seeking Jesus. Jesus asks them the question above. They answer clearly: Jesus of Nazareth.

Discussion Prompts

Why does Jesus ask this question twice?

They went to seek Jesus at night. Why? What does darkness mean, spiritually speaking?

Prayer

*Jesus, you're a mystery to me sometimes. I pray that when you ask me this question, I can answer quickly and with conviction: **You**. Give me the passion to seek the REAL you and not the Jesus that I or others have fashioned.*

Digging Deeper

The soldiers and officials said they were seeking "Jesus of Nazareth." Of all the names Jesus is called in the gospels, they chose this one. Why?

Imagine yourself coming to Jesus, surrounded by friends, coworkers, and family. Jesus asks you this question. In front of everyone, what is your answer?

What does "night" have to do with seeking and with identity?

Our culture tells us to want "things." What does it mean to want a person?

Q ~ Why were you searching for me? *Luke 2:49*

Reflection

As a young boy, Jesus asks his parents and those looking for him this interesting question. We have lots of reasons why we search for Jesus. Sometimes at the root of our faith is fear. We don't want to go to hell. Sometimes we pray and seek God because we want blessings. Sometimes we use Jesus like a lucky charm.

Discussion Prompts

Why do we have to search for Jesus?

Is it possible to search for Jesus and not find him?

Prayer

Jesus, I seek you. But when I find you, you ask me this penetrating question about my motivation for seeking you. I know you're not a magic genie or a dispenser of good feelings or a way to minimize my fearful and anxious thoughts. Eventually, I want to seek you for YOU alone, but I'm not sure I'm there yet. Purify my desire and give me the clarity to see that only love will enable me to find and know you as you truly are.

Digging Deeper

Mary and Joseph were searching for the young Jesus because they loved him and were concerned for his health and safety. What are your reasons for seeking Jesus?

Inquire of others their motivations for seeking Jesus. What do you discover?

They searched for three days before they found Jesus. What is the symbolic significance of this?

Q ~ **Do you love me more than these?** *John 21:15*

Reflection

The first question that Jesus asked Peter on the beach is this one. Later, Jesus drops the "these" part of the question and asks simply "Do you love me?" It's easy to think that maybe Jesus is just changing his question slightly to keep it fresh, but no word or phrase of Jesus is ever wasted.

Discussion Prompts

What or who are "these?"

Jesus is exposing that we have other "loves." The key to his question is whether or not we love Jesus more. If you could make a list of your top "loves," what or who would make the list?

Prayer

Jesus, my heart gets all mixed up and my various loves get disordered. Other things and people move up the list and sit in first place. Only you, Lord, deserve to be my number one love. No-thing or no-one else is worthy. Reorder my loves, Lord.

Digging Deeper

Was there ever a time in your life when Jesus was your number one love? Is that still the case? Why or why not?

Take an honest look at your actions rather than your words. What does your life say about what or who you love the most?

What would your life look like if you fell madly in love with God? Does it scare you to love God above all else? Why?

Q ~ **Do you love me?** *John 21:16*

Reflection

Picture yourself on that beach. You are one of his disciples. Jesus turns to you and asks, “Do you love me?” In your imagination, look into the eyes of Jesus as he asks the question. Eyes are a window to the soul. They give us a glimpse into the inner life of a person. What do you see in the eyes of Jesus?

Discussion Prompts

Peter was hurt when Jesus asked him a third time. If Jesus asked you three times, how do you think you’d feel? Why?

Have you ever been loved deeply or loved someone else deeply? What was that experience like? Can you put it into words?

Prayer

Jesus, you ask such demanding and difficult questions. You ask me to be vulnerable, sensitive and open, which is sometimes hard and scary. You also encourage me to be honest. My honest answer to your question is. . . The reason for that is because. . .

Digging Deeper

Jesus could have asked Peter, “Will you deny me again?” “Can I trust you?” “Are you sorry for what you have done?” But instead, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Why?

After Peter’s response, Jesus says that Peter will die for that love. What are the connections between love and dying?

Q ~ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? *Luke 12:25*

Reflection

Jesus talks about something we're all familiar with: *worry*. He places our anxious feelings in a context that involves God's goodness, involvement, and care. Jesus invites us to pay attention to creation in this case, flowers and birds. He encourages us to notice how God takes care of them and then challenges us to let go of our worry and trust in his power and generosity.

Discussion Prompts

On a scale from 1-10, how much do you worry?

What do you tend to worry about?

Does worry accomplish/do anything?

Prayer

Jesus, I'm worried about . . .

Give me the courage and the power to trust in you and to leave my worries behind. Give me wisdom to know what I can actually influence and control. Grow me in my faith and help me to drop my anchor into your goodness and grace.

Digging Deeper

Consider your family of origin. Were you influenced/shaped by a family pattern of worrying? Was there a particular person who carried the anxiety?

How do you know when you are worrying? What are the signs? How can others tell when you're feeling anxious?

Invite some friends over for tea. Invite everyone to talk about what they are worried about the most. Confess your worry and pray for each other. Read and discuss Luke 12:22-34.

**Q ~ If you love those who love you,
what reward will you get? *Matthew 5:46***

Reflection

Jesus is talking about loving our enemies—showing goodness and graciousness to those who don't give it back. When we love those who don't love us, we act just like God, who loved us while we were still sinners.

Discussion Prompts

What does the word "enemy" mean to you?

Have you ever prayed for an enemy? Why or why not?

Prayer

Jesus, this is probably one of your most counterintuitive questions. My enemies are big jerks! But Lord, you loved me and showed me kindness when I was your enemy. You came searching for me when I was lost, prideful, and stubborn, doing my own thing. You loved me when I didn't love you back. And now look at what you've done! Your gracious and faithful love drew me in and turned my world upside down.

Digging Deeper

Pray for an enemy every day this week. Did your feelings and attitudes toward him or her change over time?

Allow yourself to feel the depth of your anger and hatred for your enemies. Pray for God to meet you in those feelings. Sit there with Jesus and breath slowly and deeply.

Find a way to love someone who can't possibly love you back. Pay attention to this experience and write it down or tell a close friend about it.

Q ~ **If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?** *John 8:46*

Reflection

Jesus asks a very powerful question in the midst of a dispute about truth and lies. Jesus insists that everything he says about himself, the kingdom, life, and the Father is absolutely true. But those who are listening to him would rather believe lies.

Discussion Prompts

Do you really believe deep down that Jesus is telling the truth about everything? Why or why not?

Think about your life. What do your life and your actions say about whether or not you truly believe Jesus?

Prayer

Jesus, I like to acknowledge you with my words, but then change nothing about my life. Sadly, because of the shape of my life, it seems as though I don't really believe you at all, or at least I'm selective about what I believe. I have a lot of voices in my life telling me all kinds of things. Help me to see through the falsehood and to believe in ever-deepening ways your true words.

Digging Deeper

What lies are you currently believing?

Who in your life speaks the truth to you? How do they go about doing it? Are you a truth-speaker?

Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Read it believing that Jesus is telling the absolute and honest truth. Does this change anything for you?

Q ~ Do you still have no faith? *Mark 4:40*

Reflection

By this point in the gospel of Mark, Jesus has performed numerous miracles. This question comes in the midst of a story about Jesus calming the wind and the waves—perhaps his most powerful miracle to date. Jesus asks a difficult question about their current state of faith.

Discussion Prompts

Rate your faith on a scale from 1-10. Why that number?

Is faith hard or easy? Why?

Prayer

Jesus, you know I'm not there yet. But because of your grace, I'll keep growing in my faith every moment of every day. It seems like the journey is always three steps forward and two steps back. Maybe I should be farther along than I am, or maybe I'm exactly where I should be. I don't know. Sometimes I believe so deeply and other times I act as though I have no faith at all. Your question causes me to take a good look at my faith and all the ways you've been faithful to me in the past.

Digging Deeper

Write a list of how God has been faithful to you in the past. Do you see a pattern? How does this affect your current faith?

What is the biggest obstacle in your journey toward believing in Christ at ever-deepening levels?

Imagine your fears as some sort of animal. See that animal threatening to attack and devour you. Then imagine Jesus stepping in and taming the wild beast. See it submit and quiet down in the presence of Jesus. Listen to what Jesus wants to tell you about what has just happened.