



Questions We Ask God

Some days we wake up and wonder, where is God? Has God heard my prayers? Where is God in the midst of trouble, school shootings, hurricanes, wildfires, mudslides, lives turned upside down? Why am I expected to forgive when I have been harmed? How am I to be hopeful when I feel so lost?

This Lent we will come together to consider some of the questions we ask God. It is our hope by Easter you will discover that God is with us as we search for answers to the many challenges that we face in this life.

Questioning takes courage. It's the way we learn and the way we grow. When we ask God questions we keep the conversation going. Through stories of people who were seeking and questioning, we learn of God's grace and love. This Lent rediscover your curiosity and meet God in the questions, not just the answers.

Week 1 Small Group: Forgiveness

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15

Key Quote: Why must I forgive?

"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." C.S. Lewis

Breaking the Ice:

What story or stories could you share in order to set the tone for the small group? Your story could be a personal story, a news story, from a devotional etc. Consider using some extraordinary examples of forgiveness found in the news.

In 2006 in rural PA a man walked into a Amish schoolhouse and shot and killed 5 girls, then himself. We might have heard the story of how the families of the girls immediately offered their forgiveness to the shooter and compassion to his family. Ten years later they are still actively living out their decision to forgive as Jesus taught.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/10/01/10-years-ago-her-son-killed-amish-children-their-families-immediately-accepted-her-into-their-lives/?utm_term=.86c8add32f4c

In Korean communities the film *Secret Sunshine (Miryang)* is a familiar story of how God offers forgiveness to our enemies. When the murderer of a young child declares God has forgiven him how can the child's mother accept this claim? Discuss or show a clip.

Wrestling with the Word:

- What is forgiveness and why is it important?
- Who is responsible for forgiving, God alone or the person who has been hurt?
- How do we go to God and/or to each other for forgiveness and healing?
- Is experiencing forgiveness dependent upon it being received by the other?



Next Steps:

Read the bible passage aloud. Consider how this scripture points to both the need to be forgiven as well as the need to forgive. Forgiveness is an important aspect of Christian life. Jesus teaches forgiveness in this passage, later the Apostle Paul reiterates “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).”

We forgive because God has shown us forgiveness. In Lent we are reminded of Jesus’ words of forgiveness from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

- What is happening in the scripture? Jesus is teaching his disciples about prayer, so it could be helpful in understanding context to read the complete passage, Mat 6:5-15.
- What do you see, hear or feel from the passage?
- What are some important insights from the Bible passage?
- Consider specifically the teaching to “Forgive as you are forgiven”
- What does the passage say about the connection between prayer and forgiveness?
- What does the passage invite us to think, feel or do?
- How does this passage connect with your own story?
- From whom do you need to seek forgiveness and who might you need to forgive?
- Can you think of a situation where you need to forgive and/or seek forgiveness and are you willing to share it with the group?
- How is the scripture is inviting us to engage in this week?

The story of the Amish and the Church of the Brethren is a beautiful example of a church coming together to display Godly forgiveness and love. Too often the church has been responsible for some of the hurt in the world.

How might we as believers find ways to seek forgiveness for how the church has hurt people in our lives, and offer them God’s love and forgiveness?

Prayer for the Week:

Loving and forgiving God, we thank you for Jesus’ teaching us about prayer. Lord we recognize our own need for forgiveness and the need to be forgiving, as you are forgiving. We recognize that we as human beings and as a church have added to the hurt in our world and we long to make things right again. Help us each day to seek out ways to be more forgiving, and to ask forgiveness for our misdeeds. Make us into the models of forgiveness that you intend us to be. We pray this in the name of the one who showed forgiveness in the most powerful way we can imagine, Jesus the Christ. Amen.



Week 2 Small Groups: Silence

Scripture: Matthew 26:39 and Mat 27:45-50

Key Quote: Can we trust God when it seems like God has abandoned us?

Breaking the Ice:

After the loss of his wife, CS Lewis writes of being overwhelmed by God's silence. "Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be, or so it feels, welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become." *A Grief Observed*. Saints through the ages have experienced seasons when God seems distant. It is ok to struggle with the silence of God. Let's listen to *The Silence of God* and share why silence is often so painful.

"The Silence of God" by Andrew Peterson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvytewlxl0>

- Consider how the author weaves the story of the passion of Christ into his own experience of pain and loss. How does he reconcile his sorrow and the silence?
- Have you ever felt like you were in a place of spiritual isolation?
- Have you ever been drawn into a place of silence?

Wrestling with the Word:

- What is happening in the scripture?
- What do you see, hear or feel from the passage?
- What are some important insights from the Bible passage?
- Read Matthew 27: 51-53, when God's silence is broken. How does this change things?
- What does the passage invite us to think, feel or do?
- What do you identify with in this passage?
- How is the scripture inviting us to engage in this week?
- Are you in a season waiting for God to break the silence? Silence does not have the last word in the scripture, consider how you will remain faithful as you wait.

Prayer for the Week:

In closing you will enter into a time of silent prayer. Ask the group to take a few deep breaths to clear their minds and relax. If they wish close their eyes and for the next few moments in silence offer their thoughts to God. Instruct them if they are not sure where to begin often saying a word, such as "Jesus", or a phrase like "be still and know I am God" is helpful. Set a timer for 3 minutes. Then close simply with Amen.



Week 3 Small Groups: Hope

Scripture: Mark 8:27-30; 34, Mark 14: 27-31, Psalm 73

Key Quote: How do we go on when our hope has been dashed?

Life is a journey; along the road our hope will be shaken.

Breaking the Ice:

There was a man who was living a great and secure life, but then Hurricane Sandy hit. He attempted to piece his home back together, but without a roof, his repairs would not make a difference. When "A Future with Hope" offered to help him with home repairs, he did not believe at first that there could be such an organization. At the one year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, the homeowner shared his powerful story of moving from security, to despair and then to hope. His testimony reminds us life can change in a blink of an eye and God can use God's people to bring hope to a place of despair. Have you ever had an unexpected tragedy and were provided direction/help/hope? Where did your help and hope come from?

The road would not be easy, yet she was sure he would be healed. At first these bold proclamations of hope in the hopelessness of this disease seemed to be working. The doctor's seemed perplex that he was holding his own. At times he was even improving. But improving was not the kind of hope that she had. Week after week, the church, courageously following her lead, prayed for a complete healing. As time passed their hope grew. They claimed a miracle in Jesus' name. God's presence and power was evident in their strong faith. But somehow that faith seemed misplaced that Easter when he passed away.

Life is full of circumstances where we step out boldly in faith – proclaiming our faith in God and in an unexpected turn we find ourselves fearful and hopeless. When your plans crumble, when your proclamations of faith seem foolish, how do you move on?

At this mid-point in Lent let's stop and consider where are we headed. Will our Lenten journey offer us the true hope? Where is the hope of Jesus found amid our troubles? How do we persevere when Easter is still far off?

- Has there ever been a time when you thought something was going to be wonderful and your hopes are dashed?
- Where along your life journey has the path changed and your faith has been challenged to the point of despair?
- What is happening in the scripture?
- What happened to the exemplary faith of Peter?
- What are some important insights from the Bible passage?
- When Mary Magdalene encounters Peter in the garden after his resurrection, Jesus intentionally tells her to tell Peter that he is risen. What do you think that means?

Read portions of the Old Testament passage aloud. For some scholars Psalm 73 is considered the turning point of the psalms. Theologian Walter Bruggemann asserts "It is central theologically as well as canonically." The psalmist is in



unbearable pain and almost loses hope in God. However, eventually he realizes God's presence is there and he feels close to God. It is this transform perspective that makes all the difference in the world.

- Where do you see hopelessness and where do you sense God's hope in this passage?
- Is there a time of hopelessness that you would like to share?

Wrestling with the Word:

- What does the passage invite us to think, feel or do?
- Peter's faith seems strong to start, but when tested he fails. We know that Peter goes on to serve Jesus faithfully till his own crucifixion. How does Peter's story point to the fact that we must face trials as a true disciple?
- How does today's passages connect with your own story? Was your faith once strong but the trials of life have taken their toll?
- How will the message that Jesus is risen strengthen your faith for the journey?
- How are the scriptures inviting us to engage in this week?
- Name one personal challenge that is affecting you currently. How can you now name the hope in light of this lesson?

Prayer for the Week:

God, life is hard, we often feel discouraged. We don't see a way out. When the days are dark and Easter is still far off, help us to know that in the midst of it all, we can count on you. Thank you, God. Amen



Week 4 Small Groups: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Scripture: John 11: 23-35

All of us will experience pain. How will we trust God is present even in the difficult times?

Breaking the Ice:

Even though over 40 years have passed since the day his Dad died, he still feels a sense of loss and confusion. Why would God let this happen to his family, why did cancer steal him away? His heart still breaks when he thinks of how his mom suffered after the loss of her husband. His pain comes back each time another friend is diagnosed with cancer, the disease that stole his dad away.

- Sometimes we ask the question, "Why me?" Have you ever gone through a very difficult time in your life and felt you were walking through it by yourself, and asked God, where are you?
- Have you ever lost a loved one? In the midst of the grief have you ever asked, "Where are you God?" "Why didn't you stop this?"

Wrestling with the Word:

- Sometimes we think, "Why do bad things happen to good people? Does that mean that we strongly believe that good people deserve good things, and bad people deserve bad things?"
- What kind of bad things you believe happen to good people?
- Have you felt at one time Gods absence? When?
- How would we feel in a moment of pain that someone feels for us and cries for us? That is what Jesus did.
- What is happening in the scripture?
- What do you see, hear or feel from the passage?
- What do you think Jesus tears mean in the story? Does your perception change, when you read that Jesus wept?
- What does the passage invite us to think, feel or do?
- How does this passage connect with your own story? Where has God seemingly showed up late or not at all during your times of trouble? How have these experiences affected your faith?

In October, 2015 at Oregon's Umpqua Community College a gunman shot and killed 10 fellow students and injured seven others. The following week a nearby high school choir director leads his students in a touching rendition of the hymn *Be Still My Soul*.

<https://www.littlethings.com/canby-high-school-choir-sings/>

- Let's look at the hymn *Be Still My Soul*. What guidance or consolation does the writer offer?
- Jesus stepped into their pain and identified with them. How does Jesus do the same for us today?
- How is the scripture is inviting us to engage in this week?
- In the gospel story the town came alongside the sisters to share in their suffering. Ask yourselves who is hurting now that we/you can offer that presence?



Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, even at times when we might have felt that you are not there we know deeply that your presence has always been there, as in the story of Lazarus, Jesus was before, during and after Lazarus death, grieving deeply with Lazarus' loved ones. Help us, ever present God, to see you with the eyes of our heart, feel you with the sixth sense of our mind, hear you with the deep of our soul and join you with the beauty of our tears. Amen