

God questions?



a study on **Questions God Asks**,
(not for his knowledge, but for ours)

{Neighborhood}
S T U D I E S

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*The place God calls you to is the place where your
deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*

Frederick Buechner

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INTRODUCTION & BIBLE OVERVIEW

WEEK 1	“WHERE ARE YOU? . . .”	GENESIS 3:9
WEEK 2	“WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY & WHY HAS YOUR FACE FALLEN?”	GENESIS 4
WEEK 3	“WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM & WHERE ARE YOU GOING?”	GENESIS 16:8
WEEK 4	“WHY DID SARAH LAUGH?... IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?”	GENESIS 18
WEEK 5	“WHAT IS IN YOUR HAND?”	EXODUS 4:2
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WEEK 7	“WHO IS THIS THAT DARKENS COUNCIL BY WORDS WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE?” (FOLLOWED BY 77 QUESTIONS)	JOB 38
WEEK 8	“DO YOU DO WELL TO BE ANGRY?”	JONAH 4:4
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WEEK 10	“SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE?”	EZEKIEL

God himself does not give answers.
He gives himself.

Frederick Buechner

(PLEASE EXCUSE TYPOS AND SUCH :)

God questions?

BRIEF OVERVIEW

ON HER DEATHBED, Gertrude Stein is said to have asked, "What is the answer?" Then, after a long silence, "What is the question?" Don't start looking in the Bible for the answers it gives. Start by listening for the questions it asks.

We are much involved, all of us, with questions about things that matter a good deal today but will be forgotten by this time tomorrow – the immediate where's and when's and how's that face us daily at home and at work – but at the same time we tend to lose track of the questions about things that matter always, life-and-death questions about meaning, purpose, and value. To lose track of such deep questions as these is to risk losing track of who we really are in our own depths and where we are really going. There is perhaps no stronger reason for reading the Bible than that somewhere among all those India-paper pages there awaits each reader whoever he is the one question which, though for years he may have been pretending not to hear it, is the central question of his own life.

— Frederick Beuchner

The questions God asks are an invitation, not an interrogation. He asks them not to enlighten himself, but to invite us into conversation and enlighten us. As Jehovah (YHWH) he is self-existent – complete, all-knowing, without need or want, his questions aren't for him, but for us.

In his steadfast love, they have a purpose and a plan, not for harm but for our good, to prosper us and to impart peace. Which means his questions are never intended to shame or blame, to belittle or manipulate. They are a means to set us free from something we have believed or think that isn't life-giving, but peace-stealing.

They're very different from questions than those we ask. Which might be why it can be a challenge for us to receive his questions as they are intended to be. Since we tend to use questions to make a point, to prop ourselves up, justify ourselves, point a finger, manipulate or even shame, it can be a challenge to engage with questions God asks.

He doesn't lecture or tell or shame or state what is always obvious to Him. He invites the listener to come into the light, to be set free, to humble themselves and to feel safe, and open to honesty. Then we can wrestle (tapping God's strength and wisdom) with the issue at hand that has undoubtedly masqueraded itself as truth and life when it's the further thing from those things.

Throughout Scripture, God (and Jesus) ask questions. They invite us into some of life's most deep and raw moments. Like the people to whom they are posed, we experience similar circumstances, doubts, fear, anger, insecurity, and more. Which is why the questions are as much for us as they are for them.

Let's listen, hear and receive a few of his them together. And encourage each other to be set free in the light shown by them and life they bring.

How

Begin with PRAYER: "Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word." (Psalm 119:18).

Read the passage. Park preconceived ideas, see beyond what may be familiar. Ask God to open our eyes and ears to be able to see and hear what is available as you consider the questions.

Begin with context: who, what, when, where & why. It doesn't have to be detailed, just a quick broad overview to help understand what's going on.

- Who: Who are the players involved? Who is speaking? Who is the author? audience? ...
- What: What are they talking about? Is it a Psalm/song of praise or a story or a directive?
- When: what period of time/what was happening
- Where: the place, surroundings
- Why: the purpose-is it a promise, a command, a caution,...

Consider keeping a running list each week of specifics revealed by and about God.

Who He Is: God is: faithful, trustworthy, a sanctuary, the same yesterday/today/forever, ...

The things He does (explicit/implied): God: hears, knows my name, is LORD, never wavers, always says what He means and means what He says, speaks ...

The things He says, literally: "But now, **this is what the LORD says ...**"

Scripture Search: prompts for those who want a little extra OR search out further Scripture, having to do with that day's topic/passage.

Bonus: Just for fun and for deeper consideration of God's attributes, snippets from Kay's *Beloved of My Soul* project are included. We hope you enjoy them.

We study the Word of God to know the God of the Word and "to be transformed by the renewing our mind" (Romans 12). The goal is not to complete the tasks but to *know Him* and live in light of His Word, will and ways.

And, as we study, let's always be **mindful of applications** of the questions we will cover.

- What does this text teach me about God?
- What does this text tell me to do?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day?

Sometimes a little more information would be helpful – by all means look further. We have access to terrific guidance from outside sources. *Dr. Constable's Sonic Light*, *Bible.org*, *Got Questions* are just a few. Remember, time in Scripture is meant to be a blessing, not a burden.

Linger and Enjoy

As we read Scripture to know God, we'll learn about all the ways that HE is faithful. We'll see over and over that He never leaves us alone – that He knows us *by name*, because *we are his*.

Spend time in prayer – ask God to make His Word come alive. Ask the Lord to reveal Himself in new and meaningful ways..

*Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long (Psalm 25: 4-6)*

More than anything **HAVE FUN**. Enjoy and sink into all the wonderful things (even when some may be hard to swallow) the Lord has to share and teach us about himself and about ourselves.

(And please forgive any typos - there may be a fewJ)

Bible Overview

Before diving in, let's begin with a simple Bible overview in order to get the lay of the land.

Knowing where we are in Scripture in light of the whole is important. A lot of us know the Bible stories, like Noah and a boat or *Zacchaeus* the wee little man or baby Moses in a basket. In considering them as stand-alone stories, we might miss the overarching time-line that puts these stories into perspective and ties everything together. Knowing the way these work together can take our Bible to being three-dimensional rather than feeling flat. Scripture becomes alive as we put the pieces together.

If we went to the bookstore, we would see the books arranged by subject and type of literature. Our Bible works in a similar way. It is one book. But like a store, it houses many books that are arranged by subject and type. The Bible's arrangement begins with two major books: the Old Testament (before Christ) and the New Testament (from Christ's birth – on.)

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is made up of 39 individual books written by twenty-eight different authors and spans the period of two thousand years. It begins with creation and tells the story of the Jewish people up to the time of Christ.

Within the **Old Testament**, are several books. The **historical books**, arranged chronologically, the **poetic books**, and the **prophetic books**. The prophetic books *proclaimed* the word of God both for the future and for the present. These are labeled as "major" and "minor" simply according to the letter's length. These books were penned before (PreE) , during (E) and after (PostE) the time of the Jewish nation's exile from the land promised to them by God.

A natural division that we'll follow for the purposes of our study are:

- **The Patriarchs** covers the Lord's setting apart a people/nation through which redemption will come. Genesis chapter 12 records the covenantal promise made by God to Abraham. A promise that will be fulfilled by Christ through the line of Abraham:

- **The Exodus/Law** covers the period of the Jewish nation in which God leads them out of captivity in Egypt and into the land promised to the Patriarchs.
- **Judges** covers the period of time when the Lord led and governed the Jewish nation. God worked through *Judges* who were not only leaders, but also warriors and sometimes prophets. Disbelief leads to disobedience, to consequence - to repentance & redemption – on repeat
- **The Kings** cover an expansive time in the Jewish nation’s history as chronicled in 1st & 2nd Kings, 1st & 2nd Chronicles. The prophetic books, which fall within this period, are designated as major and minor simply based on size, with further designation associated with the time of their authorship {Pre-Exile (PreE), during Exile (E), & Post-Exile (PostE)}
- **The Silent Years** refers to the time between the Old and New Testaments during which the Lord did not speak to the Jewish nation. This ended with the coming of John the Baptist, the Messiah’s forerunner.

The following chart will hopefully help give some perspective on the Old Testament’s timing:

Historical	Poetry	Prophets:
Genesis – “The Beginnings” & patriarchs	Job	
Exodus Leviticus Numbers –counting of the people Deuteronomy –restating of the Law Joshua - faith to obedience to blessing		
Judges Ruth		
1 & 2 Samuel – beginning of the Jewish kings 1 & 2 Kings – history of the kingdoms 1 & 2 Chronicles “	Psalms Proverbs book of wisdom Song of Solomon Ecclesiastes	Isaiah (PreE) Jeremiah (PreE) Lamentations (PreE) Hosea (PreE) Joel (PreE) Joel (PreE) Amos (PreE) Obadiah (PreE) Jonah (PreE) Micah (PreE) Nahum (PreE) Habakuk (PreE) Zephaniah (PreE) Micah (PreE)
Esther (exile) Ezra (exile/post exile) Nehemia (exile/post exile)		Ezekiel (E) Daniel (E) Haggai (PostE) Zechariah (PostE) Malachi (PostE)

The Period between the Old and New Testaments is designated by hundreds of years of silence – as far as the Lord outwardly communicating with the Jewish people. The silence was broken by the Lord’s covenantal promise (from Genesis 12) coming to fruition through an unlikely event that involved a faithful, young girl.

The New Testament

The **New Testament** is made up of 27 individual books written by nine different authors. It records Jesus’ birth, ministry, death & resurrection as well as the ministry of His disciples. It also includes the prophetic book of Revelation, written by John. The New Testament covers a time period of less than a hundred years. It is made up of **Historical Books** (up until 60 AD), the **Pauline Epistles** (written between 48-67 AD) and the **General Epistles** (written between 48 and 95 AD), **Prophetic** (AD 96)*

Historical Books	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles	Prophetic
Mathew Mark Luke John Acts (author Luke)	Galatians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Corinthians Romans Ephesians Colossians Philemon Philippians 1 Timothy Titus 2 Timothy	James 1 Peter 2 Peter Hebrews Jude 1, 2, 3 John	Revelation

*Bible Gateway

God questions?

“WHERE ARE YOU? . . .

GENESIS 3:9

God uses questions to force us to confront our own hearts. He questions us not because He needs to know and understand something about what’s going on, but because He wants us to know and understand the truth of what’s going on. Through questions, God forces us to turn our gaze on ourselves, our hearts, and our motivations. He makes us look deeply into ourselves, knowing that He already knows, and then own up to that which we have either been unable or unwilling to see previously.

As He did in the garden, God might ask us, “Where are you?” not because He doesn’t know, but because He wants us to bring into the light the fear and shame that keeps us in hiding.

Let us embrace them.

Answer them.

And know that the Father is only waiting for us to acknowledge what He already knows.

– Michael Kelley

Recently we grabbed dinner at a favorite local spot. Sitting next to us on the patio, a young lady, strapped in her high chair, wanted nothing to do with her food or her mother’s insistence to “eat one bite.” All she wanted was the milk shake sitting on the table in front of her. In a moment of frustration, the little girl screeched and flailed her arms, clipping the vanilla shake that then flew from the table and hit her father before splatting on the ground.

The frustrated, scared and tired little one put her hands over her eyes to as if to disappear, thinking no one could see her if she couldn’t see them.

There is a term for that kind of escape: dissociation. Sometimes people literally leave, physically separating themselves from situations they don’t like. Other times people leave in their mind, disconnecting their thoughts, feelings and sense of self in the moment. Tiny kids do it openly, others are a little less obvious – sometimes unaware.

When faced with an overwhelming situation, Adam and Eve felt the same. They physically left and hid in hopes that they could separate themselves from what had happened, somehow make it all go away.

But God. God always sees and knows. And, he meets us where we are. He enters our pain and despair and covers, protects, provides and makes a way, sometimes through boundaries. He doesn’t leave us to ourselves, but frees us – often using questions to help break the chains.

He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
and burst their bonds apart.

Psalm 107:14

Have you ever found yourself overwhelmed, wanting to disappear? Have you done something, said something that instantly flooded you with regret? What?

What did you do?

And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched place
and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Isaiah 58:11

Where are you?

But the LORD called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" . . . "Who told you that you were naked?" "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

Then the LORD said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?"

God won't abandon us in our fear or shame

Begin with prayer, "Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word."

Read: **Genesis 1-2**

Feel free to skim Genesis 1 and 2 for context, jotting down character traits you see revealed about God in creation (ask God to show you.)

What is revealed about God's power? authority? provision? protection? What part of his authority speaks to you, to your situation today?

What is different about God's creation of man compared to everything else?

What did the Lord command man & who did he give the command to? How can we get things confused? Why do you think God set this boundary? What is he revealing about himself?

Read: **Genesis 3**

Begin with Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story. As you read chapter three, linger and consider the greater story (steadfast love, redemption, restoration, righteousness) alongside human condition issues woven in the story.

What is revealed about God's economy/way contrasted to the world's economy/way?

What role does "seeing" and eyes play in their (and our) story? Where are their eyes/focus/perspective before the lie, after the lie? ...while "fixing" the problem themselves? ...while receiving God's provision and protection?

What conversation takes place with the serpent? What tactic is employed? Where is the Lord while all this is happening?

Compare and contrast Genesis 2:25 and 3:8. What has changed?

What drives Adam and Eve into hiding? How does God meet them (us) there?

What are the questions God asks and why? (hint: not to catch or condemn, but to help). . . What is God really asking?

What might Adam's reaction reveal about his relationship with God? about God's safety? How does this impact our ability to hear and receive God's question.

The LORD's steadfast love and mercy aren't shy. They have/are/will always present, and are revealed as quickly as human-condition arrives on the scene. God's questions are an invitation to enter a conversation, an invitation to truth, light and life, lest Adam and Eve (in this story) and we (in our stories) be left at the mercy of ourselves. God's questions gently/relentlessly shine a light on our spinning wheel stalls and offer a reboot that not only impacts their/our momentary problem, but offers truth and hope for moments to come.

May He guide and help us to see (as He guided them) what lies in wait to bait us AND to see/receive Truth that frees, Hope that binds, Love that guards us.

Scripture Search: if you have time – Read **Psalm 139**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

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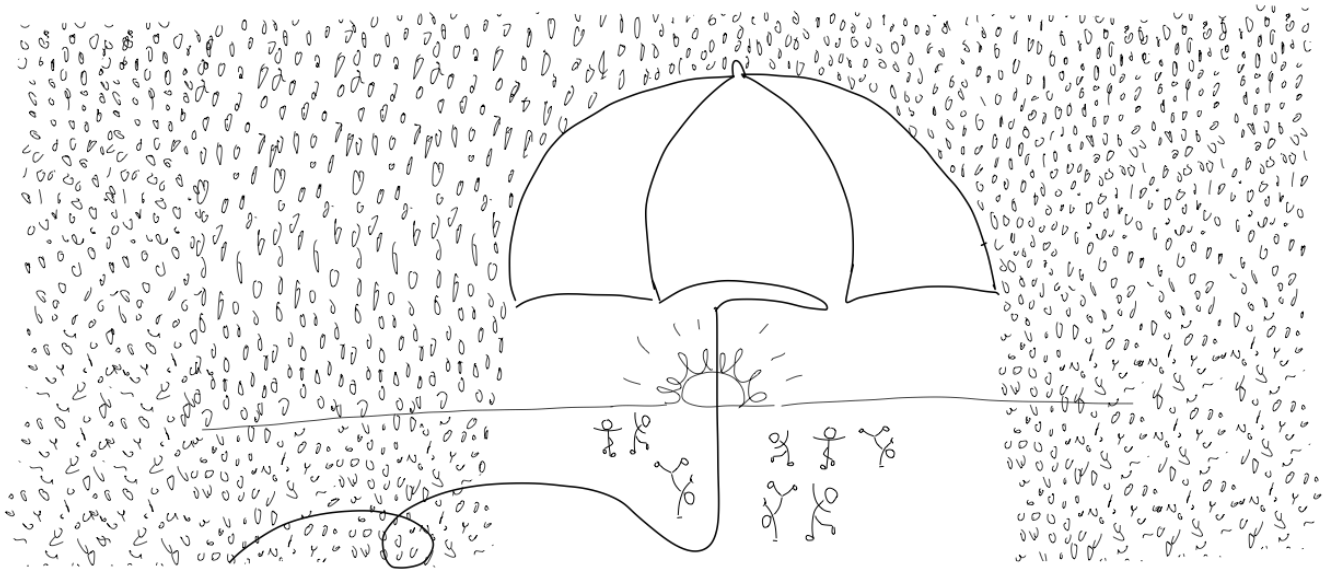
How can his question “Where are you” bring your focus back to him by calling out what is stealing your thoughts and focus from Him?

God’s question invites us to come out of hiding, to take off our “fig leaves”, and to become more real. Our relationships with God and others change for the better when we begin to do this. When we come before our Creator in simple honesty, there is a response on God’s part that helps us to know that we are loved. God lets us know that we are accepted, just as we are. As a result, we don’t need to pretend so much anymore. We can come out from where we have been hiding and start to relate more openly and freely.ⁱ – Trevor Hudson

Mindful of application of God’s question – “Where are you?”

- What’s happening in life? has you hiding? tricked you into being in control?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.



PROTECTOR

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Whether we are sitting or standing, coming or going, asleep or awake - God SEES and KNOWS us (even inner thoughts that so often deceive us, ourselves) ... and he stays.

God not only stays, he hems us in from behind and before, above and below. The Lord God Almighty lays his hand upon us.

God is: with us - always
 beside us - always
 protecting, caring and loving us - always.

No place,
 no boundary,
 no situation,
 no thought . . . can separate us from him.

 He sees all. He knows all. He alone is Lord over all.

And, God counts us worthy.
(even though we wallow in our self-defined unworthiness.)

In Him there is no darkness - none. Darkness has no power - no power to hide or to rule over us. Darkness is light to God for HE IS LIGHT.

Shame and unworthiness wreak havoc in darkness.
 But like darkness, they disappear when met by LIGHT.

Dare we grab hold of his powerful truth?

 Truth that helps us walk *through* rather than run *from* situations

 Truth that, when believed and owned, allows us to genuinely love people who live in and sometimes create stress-filled environments
 (even when we do it to ourselves).

Dare we lean into compassion rather than give way to feelings of judgment or shame?

Hemmed in and anchored to and found by God - YES!

God questions?

“WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY & WHY HAS YOUR FACE FALLEN”

GENESIS 4

*When God asks a question, He’s not launching an interrogation;
He’s staging an intervention.*

Glen Packiam

My husband’s family spent a good portion of their life in South America living with an indigenous tribe of Indians. My father-in-law shared the following story about comparison:

During our time in South America, Wayne Gill introduced the game of soccer to the Chimani Indians of Central Bolivia. Soccer is loved and played in all cities and villages of South America, but was unknown in many of the primitive tribes. With just about anything wound up in a round shape with cloth and vines, and some space they soon learned the joy of soccer. They learned some of the basic skills of controlling the ball and scoring goals, they were not much into the competition aspect. On one of the very early occasions, after scoring a goal, the winning team was asked why they slowed down the pace of the game.. They answered, "we scored our goal, we should give the other team a chance." They had great fun just playing the game, trading goals, celebrating each other.

Of course this did not last long as they realized/observed how the game was played in the rest of the world. It was interesting to watch the game move from pure enjoyment and celebration of others to winning – being better than others.

The questions God poses to Cain in Genesis 4 are difficult. We are faced again with feeling the discomfort of sin (now actual death) in the same space as God’s mercy and love (the essence of his character).

Comparison is at play in this story as it was in Adam and Eve’s enlightenment trek. It is a brutal tool and part of daily lives in this world. The power of comparison is most often wielded for destruction rather than edification (even/especially when we do it to ourselves.) But, it also has a life-component when transformed from against another to alongside each other through compassion.

God invites Cain to go deep, to his soul where the heart of the matter reveals where he has attached his worth and identity: *performance*, with all its pressures and expectations and obsession with comparison-laden *enough*.

But God, our Help (Yeshua, Jehovah my Help, Jesus) stands alert, en-route to rescue.

Has there ever been a time you were motivated by comparison, acted, then made it about the win? Why?

Where did the results leave you?

“(God’s) eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step” (Job 34:21).

Why are you so angry?

The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you so angry and why has your face fallen?”

... “Where is Abel your brother?”

... “What have you done?”

God relentlessly, mercifully invites us into Truth

Begin with prayer, “Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word.”

Read: **Genesis 4:1-17**

Begin with Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

Compare and contrast the brothers livelihoods and offerings. Why are there offerings? How does the offering help mankind (which we know to be the case since they are already a part of daily activity.) Why do you think God found favor with one brother and not the other?

Where is God while all this is going on? How do we know?

How did Cain respond?

How did God respond?

God's questions *why, where, what* cut to the chase. Why are they so productive?

The first question shines light on the heart, using one of the most powerful questions, "Why". It is such a useful tool, especially when posed & protected by God. Any time unsettledness enters your sphere, consider asking it (why?) – alongside a quick prayer: show me, help me see and hear.

Why are you angry/has your face fallen goes to and reflects the source of *why* we do what we do. Anger, anxiety, jealousy, worry and such are usually anchored in fear. Not awe and wonder of God (fear of the Lord), but afraid of ... fill in the blank.

Which is where we find Cain – having offered sacrifice like Abel, yet heart-different – his identity and worth are in play.

- If I'm obeying simply to obey, I'm empty – at the mercy of *enough*
- If I'm acting out of believing/receiving from a place of wholeness, I'm settled.

What is at heart of Abel and Cain's offerings to God?

What are the consequences God imposes?

Does God leave Cain at the mercy of the world around him? Does He leave us at the world's mercy? How can Cain know? How can we know?

What does this story and these questions teach us about God's love, his grace, his protection, provision and peace?

Let's fast forward to another sibling story, this time sisters. Read: **Luke 10:38-42**

Quick - Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why

What is each sister doing? Is either doing anything *wrong*?

At first glance, it might look like Jesus is calling out actions, but what is really at play? What is the true source of Martha's frustration? Is she angry... has her face fallen? ... why? Has this ever been you?/why? What was happening?

How is Jesus going to the heart of the matter? ... setting Martha free? ... inviting her to live in freedom while at the same time "working"/living out her purpose and gifting?

How can this apply to you? ... your purpose and gifting? ... our tendency to compare, to compensate, to judge and justify?

What are practical ways can we *obey* (the action piece of faith) out of believing/receiving from a place of wholeness, settled rather than performing in order to be okay?

The questions God ask in this story, especially when coupled with consequences, might feel like a verdict. But, this isn't a courtroom.

This is the story of Creator, caring for his creation. He is helping Cain think and speak so that he might grasp the ruthless nature of all that is not Light and Life – that hat he might understand that doing-in-order-to-be okay/approved/winner might look good, but is most often an endless prison.

Scripture Search: If you have time, read Isaiah 44:1-8. What is revealed about God? How can this power and authority over all things seen and unseen inform your (or that of someone you love) circumstance or situation today?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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God in his mercy, doesn't leave Cain to himself and deadly actions. He meets Cain in his anger and fallen face – a place where peace is lacking. God (fully aware of the answers) questions Cain. He reveals sin's selfish nature, the power of it – yet, limited power as God is authority over all things.

And, as He did in the Garden, He points to Hope – the “voice of ... blood crying out to me (God)”, now not “from the ground”, but from on High where Christ's cries out on our behalf every day.

Jesus is the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for acquittal.

– Tim Keller

God won't leave us alone stuck in spinning-wheel stalls, left to ourselves and our limited wisdom.

Lord, help us be able to hear and to see the things within us that steal, rather than give life.

Mindful of application of God's question – “Why are you angry?”

- What ignites anger? makes you unsettled? feels fair/unfair?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

ZECHARIAH 9

TRUTH & PEACE

(God speaking)

*"I will encamp at my house as a guard
... I see with my own eyes"*

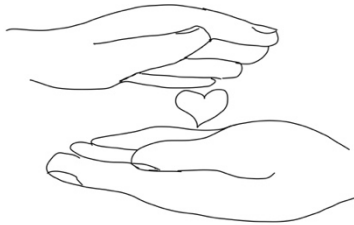
Jesus, Yeshua (Jehovah my Help)

comes to me with salvation
comes in humility
speaks peace (to me)
rules from sea to sea, to the end of the earth
is the blood of God's covenant with/for me

the LORD my God

restores double
protects me
saves me
holds me in his hand

his GOODNESS is GREAT



God questions?

“WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM & WHERE ARE YOU GOING?”

GENESIS 16:8

A question has greater power to transform us than a straightforward answer, especially when it comes from God who knows exactly what questions to ask.

Trevor Hudson

Have you ever feel so unseen, forgotten, overlooked?

Memories of grade school recess pop in my head, reminding me of youthful fears on the playground. *Please see me. Choose me.*

Once or twice in class the English teacher chose me to set up the film projector. I might have even had the pleasure of cleaning erasers after school. Why banging those black erasers filled with a day’s chalk counted as a privilege, I’m still not sure. But I never was chosen to lead anything on the playground.

The coach gravitated toward the popular crowd. And the poppies picked their friends first. Inside sighs of relief turned into fist pumps, cheers, nods and whispers amongst themselves about who should be next. Tall, awkward people with glasses – like me – were picked last. It was stressful. Standing there. Being compared and weighed against all the others by the chosen.

Red Rover may be gone. But such stress plays on many of life’s stages: vying for position, a role, a place, a title; searching for acceptance, hoping to find answers to core human needs to be accepted, to be seen, to be loved.

Which is where Hagar found herself, mistreated and rejected – alone. So she ran. Fully convinced that not only would no one care or miss her, but that no one would even notice. And if they did, a celebration would be at hand.

God’s questions to Hagar are for us as much as they were for her – to bring into the light, then to satisfy her (our) core soul-needs, so she can go/walk in wholeness.

Has there ever been a time you felt unseen, forgotten, overlooked?

How did it make you feel? Why do you think you remember it?

“Fear not. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1

Where have you come from and where are you going?

The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"

God sees, knows & loves me – all of the time, everywhere.

Begin with prayer, "Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word."

Read: **Genesis 16**

Begin with Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

As with many stories, especially those referring to ancient culture, complicated seems to be an understatement. We catch the story of Abram many years after God has declared his intentions to bless Sarai with a son through whom the nations would be blessed (Gen. 15). With neither Abram nor Sarai in the spring-chicken category, they try to work things out, to the best of their understanding. Enter Hagar – the perfect surrogate ... until she gets pregnant.

In what ways do we see human nature play out in Sarai? in Abram? in Hagar?

How do their reactions reflect their core pain or issues?

What do we learn about God's timing? What about his Promise? (scan Genesis 15) ... the workings of his covenants?

What is the very first things we learn about God in this passage (16:7)

Did Hagar feel seen? Did Sarai? Does feeling seen (or known or loved) have any bearing on the reality that they/we are? How is that addressed in the text?

In what ways is it significant that God revealed his name **El Roi** (God who Sees Me) to Hagar who in turn was the first, only, person to claim it and to say it aloud?

Where do you (or someone you love) feel unseen today? How does God's name El Roi speak satisfy this core human need. Where can you (or help someone else) claim it – and breathe?

Fast forward to read **Luke 8:42b-48**. Quickly note the who, what, when, where & why.

Who is the main character? Did she feel seen, known, worthy? Why or why not?

What question does Jesus ask? Why does it seem on the surface to be ridiculous? How, in fact, is it significant to everyone involved?

Why do you think Jesus outed the woman? How did his question invite her into Life and Light?

Though you may/may not be physically ailing, what troubles your thoughts to trick you into feeling unseen, unworthy, discardable, ...?

How does Jesus’s mercy, grace, wisdom and power offer light and life to you?

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **Psalm 121**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

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Mindful of application of God’s question – “Where have you come from and where are you going?”

- What is your answer to this question? How can El Roi satisfy soul-needs that pave your path?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

God questions?

“WHY DID SARAH LAUGH?... IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?

GENESIS 18

If God asks a question, He already knows the answer. God’s questions are always for the sake of the person who needs the answer.

Janet Denison

Our family is on year eighteen of trauma fall-out.

Sharing details isn’t important. On the grand scale, it really doesn’t help to know.

Mostly because we all have trauma. *And*, we all just can’t stop ourselves from doing, what we do – compare. And when we compare, we land in a place that discounts or inflates a story, either ours or yours. Making yours worse than mine (which it might be) OR making mine worse than yours (which it might be). Neither side of the comparison game helping either of us. Because *worse* or *better* only stalls us. So – COMPARISON doesn’t get a seat at this table.

Hardship is part of the human experience.

Which is where we find Sarai, amidst very real tragedy: old and infertile with no hope and people knew. She and Abram had been given a sweeping promise from God, to them, no way of it being fulfilled through her. It would be hard to overstate the enormity of this glaring infertility trial/trauma – it spoke into her worth, her acceptability, even her (and her husband’s) religious standing.

But God.

“for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me...
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

Isaiah 46: 9b-11

Have you (someone you love/know) been in a seemingly unsolvable situation? ...tempted to give up on God? ... to give up period?

How did you feel? What helped?

[sidenote: Trauma is painful – period. It IS important to never travel such roads in isolation. A trusted few (some being professional) is key.]

Why did Sarah laugh? . . . Is anything too hard for the LORD?

They said to (Abraham), “Where is Sarah your wife?” . . .

The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD?”

God outs doubt, does the impossible

Begin with prayer, “Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word.”

Read: **Read Genesis 17-18:15**

Begin with Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

What are the name changes? How does this offer hints to/evidence of the nature of God’s promise?

How is Abraham’s laughing different than Sarah’s? (Fast forward for a similar situation with Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1)

What does the first question indicate? What clarity is offered? How does this address doubts that have understandably paved this road?

God is the promise maker and promise keeper. His covenant promises are made and fulfilled by His handling both sides of the agreement. And like the nation of Israel liberation’s (from slavery in Egypt) greater story of our freedom from sin’s slavery, this story of an unlikely woman giving birth to a son is the precursor to the greater story of Christ’s birth, sacrifice and salvation.

What does this story reveal about God? His Presence, power, knowledge, faithfulness, timing?

What doubts pave your path? seemingly unanswered questions/prayers? Specifically, how does God's knowledge, power & faithfulness address them?

*...if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.
2 Timothy 2:13*

For further consideration, let's fast forward to another seemingly impossible situation.

Read: **Mark 9: 14-27**

Quick - Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why. Ask the LORD to open your eyes and ears to his authority over all things (seen and unseen).

What happened right before this encounter? How can this inform our perspective?

What question does Jesus ask the crowd? Why?

What is the father's first request? How long had their trial been happening?

What is Jesus' question to the man? What does this reveal?

What can this teach us about trust? faithfulness?

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **ISAIAH 46**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

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Mindful of *application of God's question* – “Why did Sarah laugh?... Is anything too hard for the LORD?

- What has you doubting? What makes it hard to believe? (Ask God for help.)
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

NEAR ME

"...the LORD bestows favor and honor."

What is Near?

NEAR is knowing.

God knows us better than we know ourselves.

God knows: when I sit	God knows: my thoughts
when I rise	my coming
all my ways	my going

*Before a word is on my tongue, God knows,
You trace my journeys and my resting places.*

NEAR is safety.

God blanket-protects us, literally surrounding/bordering, our perimeter

*You hem me in, behind (past) & before (future), you lay (present)
your hand upon me*

NEAR is with.

God is with me in the heights, in the depths, in light, in darkness

*even then your hand shall lead me,
your right hand shall hold me*

NEAR is peace.

Nothing can stand in the way. Shalom - wholeness, completeness, the coming together of opposites, where light swallows dar,

Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as day

NEAR is experiencing.

Beholding, encountering, becoming what God made us to be: HIS

NEAR is intimacy.

Closeness, at the core, soul-knowing.

NEAR is forever.

Deep closeness, soul-knowing for all eternity. God leads me next to me, before me, behind me, beside me, in full knowledge of me . . .

in his everlasting way
in steadfast love



God questions?

“WHAT IS IN YOUR HAND?”

EXODUS 4:2

Questions are at the heart of the Bible. Many of the major events—in the Old and New Testament alike—are marked with a question. God uses these questions to reveal important truths about Himself.

Each question in these momentous occasions reveals vital information regarding God’s identity and love. As questions are asked throughout the Scriptures, again and again we are pointed to who God is—a God of steadfast love and mercy, a God who seeks and saves the lost.

Andrew R Jones

Several years ago our family hiked, upon my suggestion, one of Sedona, Arizona’s canyon trails. It was a trail I had hiked pre-marriage, pre-kids, so my fond memories had forgotten that the beautiful canyon path crossed water at least a dozen times. Which can be fun, but not so much with little kids *or* with two visually impaired kids.

I felt terrible as I stood at a crossing next to my niece who could hear the water and laughter at others trying to navigate slippery rocks and make their way to the other side.

I watched as my brother steadily slipped next to her and assuredly whispered in her ear, “we’ve got this.” He put her hand on his shoulder and instructed her to follow his voice and lead. “Ready?” he asked. She took a deep breath and nodded. “Okay,” he said. “Here we go. Lead with your right foot. Now left. Right. Together. Wait. Okay, right...” and on she went, crossing the stream. She knew his voice. Knew his love for her, his safety and his eyes that could see what her eyes could not.

Often we find ourselves in a similar spot. Facing a task we can’t do. Which is where we find Moses.

One of the hardest things to understand and trust is God’s strength/power. We read about it, hear witnesses, can attest to it in our own lives, but still struggle to believe it’s real. God asks this question to help Moses/us with perspective that we might know.

When have you been faced with an almost impossible task?

How did you realign your perspective? What helped you move forward?

For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Isaiah 41:3

What is that in your hand?

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’”

The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

...

Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.

God empowers

Begin with prayer, “Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word.”

Read: Exodus 3 – 4:17

Begin with Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where & why.

Who calls? Who sends? Who equips & is the power?

What does this reveal about our part? And how does this impact our daily efforts (to act, to wait, to love others and ourselves, . . .)?

What question does God ask Moses and how does the question help Moses with perspective?

What is the role of the staff? What does it symbolize?

How does God meet Moses (us) in his (our) uncertainty, doubt, fear? What has you, or someone you love, feeling in an impossible place today?

Moses can speak with confidence, not based on himself, but through derivative authority from the One who gives it to Moses. Moses' ability is not in himself, but derived from God's absolute authority and power which is God's to give and to direct. Moses' (our) actions are based in dependent authority/power – dependent on the sender, not on us.

Let's fast forward and consider another example:

Read: **Mark 6: 30-44**

Begin with quick Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where & why.

Compare these two stories – how are they similar?

What role does sight play? How is what is seen realigned to what God sees/does?

How is derivative authority and power in play?

How does derivative power & authority impact/inform our actions? our trust, faith, obedience?

What else? . . .

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **Psalm 18**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

Mindful of *application of God's question* – “What is in your hand?”

- What seems impossible for you in a certain circumstance or season of life? How can you lean into God's strength and power?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

JEREMIAH 1

KNOWS

"do not be dismayed"

God:

is with me

explains to me

comes to me

speaks to me

touches me

*"for I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right
hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."¹*

empowers me

sees me

knows me

appoints me

sets me apart

sets me high

watches over me

calls me

gives me the words to say

teaches me

includes me

protects me

delivers me

THE LORD declares . . . and it is so

God works T H R O U G H us

He makes us a fortified city

*"(situations/circumstances/people) will fight against you, but
they shall not prevail against you,
for I AM WITH YOU"*

¹ Isaiah 41:3

God questions?

“WHY DO YOU CRY TO ME?”

EXODUS 14:15

I have often wondered why God would want to ask us questions. There could be several reasons. To begin with, God wants to enter into a conversational relationship with each of us. One way in which God shows this deep desire is by asking questions. They are the same questions that God asked the people of God throughout the Bible. When we start hearing them as addressed to us, we receive a glimpse into those things that God wants to talk about with us. Our answers draw us into a conversation.

Trevor Hudson

I recently saw a t-shirt of a sloth hanging on the “DO” word in Nike’s “Just Do It” with “Later” added to the end. I’m all for procrastination (since I often put off until tomorrow something I could do today), but one thing I can barely stand is not-doing when everything is all systems go. Just do it.

With my kids, learning to jump off the diving board is just one case. Even though it looked fun and they so want to do it, they would inevitably stand at the end of the board ready to jump, peeking down to the water, then loudly question me as I treaded water below them, “NOW?” ... “NOW?” ... “NOW?” To the point where my encouraging *now is great ... you can do it ... I’ve got you ...* escalated to a tired and frustrated “JUST GO!!” I was as much poised to catch them, to keep them safe from drowning, as I was determined that they realize they can face their fears, do more than they think, and be equipped to face challenges – as they know and grow.

The Israelites find themselves in such a stand-off. Having been freed from Egypt’s enslavement and brutal leader, they all but said out loud, “Now? ... “Now?” ... “Now?” as they stood ready to enter freedom. They had seen and experienced God’s jaw-dropping display of power, yet afraid and uncertain, they couldn’t move.

Then, Moses is met with a question.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. Psalm 63:8

Have you ever been stuck, overwhelmed by uncertainty, unable to move? What was happening?

How did you get unstuck?

Why do you cry to me?

The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward."

God meets us where we are, frees us to trust and act

Begin with prayer, "Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word."

Read: **Exodus 14**

Begin with Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story. Consider jotting down a quick overview timeline.

There is a point where faith must move from a thought to trust and our action – moving from head-knowing to actually experience-knowing. Which changes everything. We engage with/experience the mystery of God's power and strength which deeply impacts our ability to soul-know our God.

In vv 1-9, what can we learn about God? ... about the people? ... about Pharaoh?

What comes in the play in v 10?

What does Moses know to be able to face their former captor?

What is the question God asked? Why did he ask it? (remember it's for them, not for him)

Who is God revealing himself to, that they might know that He is LORD? How? What can we learn about God's steadfast love? ... his authority, grace, mercy even in horrible situations?

How does this point to greater story behind the story?

What is the key to traveling through adversity? What role does our eye play? How can friends/mentors help?

Let's fast forward and read: **Matthew 14:22 - 33**

Begin with Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

What happened directly before this passage? What did the disciples in the boat see and experience?

How is Jesus equipping them/us to lean in and experience him? ... his power? ..his authority? ...his strength?

What is the key to walking through adversity? Where is God?

What question does Jesus ask Peter? Why? How can receiving and answering this question help us as we start to sink?

What role did Peter's eye play? How does our perspective inform our faith?

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Isaiah 49:16

Scripture Search: if you have time, Read **Psalm 31** (It's a tiny bit long :) Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

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Mindful of application of God's question – "Do you do you cry to me?"

- What gets you stuck, stalled, overwhelmed by the enormity of a situation? Why? How can a perspective shift and trust help?
- What role can fellow travelers play?

- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

DECLARES

(I AM) a God at hand ... not a God far away.

”

Am I a God at hand
and not a God far away?

can a man hid himself in secret places
so that I cannot see him?

Do I not fill the heaven and the earth?

Is not my word like fire
and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

I will give (you) a heart to know
that I am God ...

GOD DECLARES. . .

That I might know – He is near, never far away

That I might know – He sees me

That I might know – I am safe

That I might know – God goes before & behind me in power & strength

That I might know – He alone is Yahweh (breath of life)

in all

through all

before all

over all

God questions?

“WHO IS THIS THAT DARKENS COUNCIL BY WORDS WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE”

JOB 38

Our questions for God are often numerous—but have we deeply considered the questions that He asks us? Because God is all-knowing, His questions in Scripture can be easy to pass over as we read and study. After all, He already has the answers, right? But what if His reason for questioning us isn't to discover something new but to challenge us to consider the state of our own hearts? Exploring our responses will help us to better understand the fullness of the Gospel and the power of God's character.

Allistar Begg

There was a funny skit on SNL with Gilda Radner. As news reporter Emily Litella, she would give the responsible opposing viewpoint to a Weekend Update's editorial. Certain of the issue at hand, Emily would fire up her facts, stats and details to cover the “other” side.

Ramping up one response, she took on parents objecting to violins on television.

“What all this fuss I keep hearing about violins on television? – Now why don't parents want their children to see violins on television? Why, I thought the Leonard Bernstein's concerts were just lovely. Now – if they only showed violins after 10 o'clock at night, the little babies will all be asleep. And they won't learn any music appreciation! They'll end up wanting to play guitar, and bongo drums. And go to Africa. And join these Rock & Roll outfits. And they won't drink milk!! – I say there should be MORE violins on television.”

Until Chevy Chase gently interrupts and informs her the story was actually about the “violence” on television, not violins.

Emily's reply? A polite, “Never mind.”

She *thought* she knew what she was talking about, but actually had no idea.

We find Job and his friends (and ourselves sometimes, if we're honest), in a similar space on certain topics related to God. Their grappling conversation goes from one place to the next, each presenting their case with certainty. Trying to make sense of Job's suffering, trying to justify their striving – each makes bold statements about God, his will and his way.

Until a revelatory question is asked by the One who knows.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

Isaiah 40:28

Have you (or someone you know) been in a conversation or situation when you thought you had absolute expertise on a topic and what was it?

Is it easy or hard to admit you might be wrong? ... to be right with grace?

Who is it that darkens my council by words without knowledge?

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

God frees us from ourselves and frees us to our true selves: Beloved

Begin with prayer, “Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word.”

Read: **Job 38**

Begin with Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

If you’d like, use this space to keep a running list of what you God reveals about himself in this and the chapters that follow:

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Pause on God's first question. Consider the layers involved. Ask him to help you hear what he's asking and how he's asking it – remembering that questions God asks are for us; they invite us into relationship, into freedom, into wholeness, into Truth. "Who is it..." is for us.

Take a few moments to fill in a little about Job, his friends, humanity.

Now fill answer the question for yourself – the real you. Ask him to show you. This is a safe place to face things we may or may not even know about ourselves that might be stealing from us.

God asks 77 questions in Job 38-42. Why would he take the time to ask questions rather than simply declare.

How do hear these questions (as accusations, anger, disgust, ...)? Why?

How does God actually offer them to be heard?

Inasmuch as God knows ALL things, how do his questions reveal eternal reality (which is today as much as it is tomorrow and yesterday). What is he revealing about himself, inviting us to know about him?

Keeping in mind the revelatory aspect of his questions, which ones (feel free to continue reading more revelations in chs 38-42) touch you (or someone you love) in your circumstance, place of need or situation today?

How can/do these questions invite freedom and Sabbath rest?

Inasmuch as God intimately knows, provides for and protects all of these aspects of creation and creatures, how much more does he do this for us, His Imago Dei? Jot down specifics. How does he reveal his authority, his knowledge? Is there anything, any place, any power, anything that has authority over him? How do you know?

In light of this, how does the fact that He declares you “the beloved of his soul” (Jeremiah 12:7) settle your soul? How does Job receive what God’s questions? (42:1-5)

Fast forward and read **John 14:1-11**

Begin with quick Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where & why.

What is Jesus revealing about himself?

How is this telling the rest of the story that God revealed to Job?

How does this inform the enormity as well as intimacy of God’s plan?

From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.
Isaiah 46:11

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **Psalm 138**. Make a list of what is revealed about God:

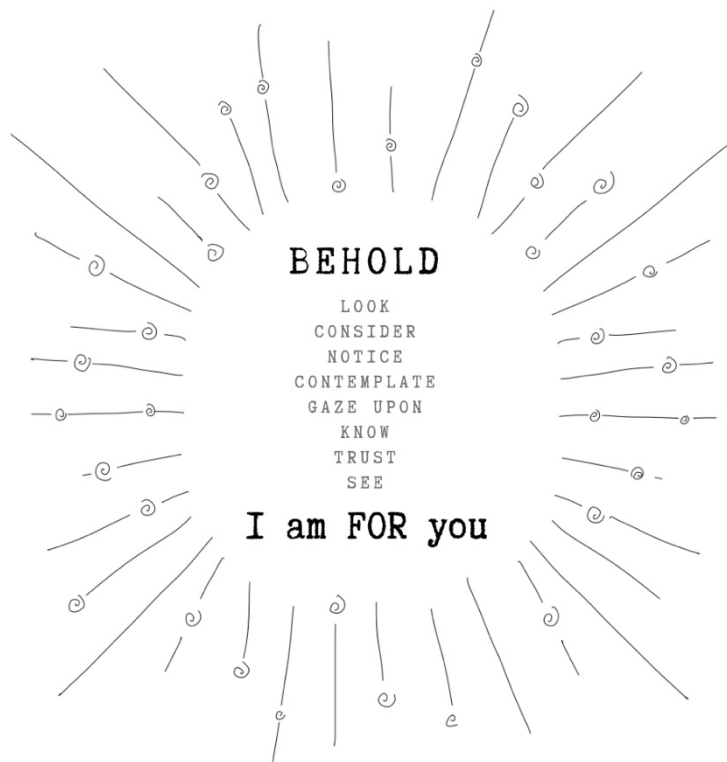
Mindful of *application of God's question* – “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

- What has you dogmatic? Where ? (Ask God for help.)
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

QUOTABLE

“and the LORD God said...”



God questions?

“DO YOU DO WELL TO BE ANGRY?”

JONAH

The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of men.

GK Chesterton

Leave it to a friendly afternoon game to reveal yet another human condition issue. This time at the playing of a card, “What?” my opponent protested. “That’s not fair.” He eyed the cards I’d played and questioned, “You had those in your hand?”

What could I do but admit, “I was dealt a great hand.”

“That’s not fair!” he protested again, now a little angry. “My hand is terrible. I’m going to lose. That’s all there is to it. I’m losing for sure.”

It’s a little like life, isn’t it? And it can happen at any stage. We start something like a new school year or a new job or a new project, and we eye each other’s cards, thinking about all the I’m-so-glad-I-gots or wallowing in the I-wish-I-hads.

We join Jonah in a situation laced with all sorts fair, not fair, should’s and could’s. With things not lining up quite right, Jonah wants nothing to do with it. Little did he realize all that was holding him hostage, God’s relentless pursuit of him – to free him from ideas preconceived ideas holding him hostage.

Has there ever been a time you were tethered to “fair”? Why?

What did fair achieve for you?

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

Do you do well to be angry?

And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

...

But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?"

God frees us from "fair"

Begin with prayer, "Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word."

Read: **Jonah 1-4**

Begin with Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

What do we learn about Jonah? (take note of specifics like: he fear the Lord 1:9, ...)

What do we learn about God? his mercy, his steadfast love, his power & authority, his relentless pursuit of people?

When, where and how many times does God ask Jonah "Do you do well to be angry? What is the heart issues God is addressing?

Have you ever felt like Jonah? Frustrated, confused, ... angry? What underlying issue do you think Jonah's anger is resulting from?

How does God invite Jonah and us to come to Him alone? How is God offering freedom from human responses? What is it about fair that can imprison us?

How does God further illuminate this heart issue through the worm's attack? What might God be offering to Jonah and to us?

Does God leave Jonah at the mercy of religion's wisdom/the concept of fairness holding his thoughts captive? Does He leave us stuck? How can Jonah know? How can we know.

What does this story and these questions teach us about God's economy of mercy, grace, love and peace?

For further consideration, let's fast forward to another story of *not fair*.

Read: **Luke 15:11-32**

Quick - Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why. Ask the LORD to open your eyes to the question posed to Jonah regarding anger that comes up in the story.

How might "fair" be at play in of this story? Who is/feels treated unfair? Why?

Is there any point the story when the boys are not their father’s sons? How might this inform our own relationship with God, our Abba Father.

How can we see beyond our situations, circumstances to lean into the enormity (safety, provision, love, mercy, ...) that informs our life?

Do you have any area in your life that make you angry, ignite feelings of fair/unfairness? How can this and Jonah’s story help us bring into the light tricky unsettledness that holds us hostage?

How can this and Jonah’s story help us bring into the light tricky unsettledness that holds us hostage?

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.
James 3;17

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **Psalm 147:1-11**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

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Mindful of *application of God's question* – “Do you do well to be angry?”

- What makes you angry? Why? What is at the core? How can awareness of why we're angry shine light on something that is stealing our peace?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

PUBLISHER

*The LORD has bared his arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends
of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.*

God has comforted
has redeemed > me . . . yesterday, today, f o r e v e r

He publishes (announces, broadcasts, declares) p e a c e

God brings good news of happiness
publishes salvation
makes me safe
says to me (tenderly, boldly, for ALL - including me - to hear)
"your God reigns"

I need never panic
flee
escape quickly
run
go in flight
(whether in thought or in action)

For the LORD will go (has gone, goes) before me
For the LORD will be (has been, is) my rear guard
my protector
my safety

God questions?

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE ELIJAH?”

1 KINGS 19:9

Long before we ever got around to asking questions about God, God had been questioning us. Long before we got interested in the subject of God, God subjected us to the most intensive and searching knowledge. Before it ever crossed our minds that God might be important, God singled us out as important. Before we were formed in the womb, God knew us. We are known before we know.

This realization has a practical result: no longer do we run here and there, panicked and anxious, searching for the answers to life. Our lives are not puzzles to be figured out. Rather, we come to God, who knows us and reveals to us the truth of our lives. The fundamental mistake is to begin with ourselves and not God. God is the center from which all life develops. If we use our ego as the center from which to plot the geometry of our lives, we will live eccentrically.

Eugene H. Peterson

“Oh my gosh!! Not again!” my passenger kid gasps.

“What?” I can’t help but ask? Did I miss the exit? Hit a squirrel? Have I forgotten to be somewhere? ... to pick someone up? There’s a chance it could be any of those, or something else.

“Mom! You are completely out of gas!”

I look down to see that yes, I am out of gas. In fact the gauge has gone from number-of-miles-left to dashes, indicating the tank is not only empty, but bone dry.

We’re late and not close to our house or familiar streets on a long day. Needless to say, the search for a station ensues with great hopes that fumes will get us there. We’re all tired and can’t help but chalk it up to all seemingly endless spinning plates and stress.

Life.

We connect with Elijah at time when he is exhausted, afraid, done. King Ahab has told Jezebel his wife all that God had been doing through Elijah, specifically how Elijah utterly defeated their idol-priests, putting them in their place and slaughtering them, shaming Ahab and Jezebel in the process. At which point, “...Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, ‘May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.’

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.”¹

¹ 1 Kings 19: 2-3a

When is a time you, or someone you know, reached the place where their tank was empty – everything that could be, had been done; nothing left, no way out?

How did you feel? What did you do?

*The hand of the LORD is strong upon (you).
Ezekiel 3:14*

What are you doing here Elijah?

And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here Elijah?”

God invites us to Sabbath rest in His strength

Begin with prayer, “Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word.”

Read: **1 Kings 18:20 – 19:16**

Begin with Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

Why did Elijah run? What was informing his action?

How does the LORD meet Elijah in his fleeing?

How does the LORD meet Elijah in his fleeing? What does he do for him?

How is Elijah doing? Where does Elijah go?

What happens on the mountain? How does God meet him? What does that show us about God's mercy, tenderness, knowledge, care toward us?

What question does God ask? Why might God have asked him this? What is God revealing?

Like Hagar returning, how can Elijah go back? (...which he does: "So Elijah departed from there and found Elisha."²)

What has you exhausted? ...afraid? How might this encounter encourage you – knowing that God is the same yesterday, today and forever?

² 1 Kings 19:19

Fast forward and read: **Matthew 26: 69-71** and **John 21:1-17**. Consider the context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why.

How is Peter exhausted and afraid?

Why is Peter exhausted and afraid in Matthew 26? How does he react?

How does Jesus meet him (after the Resurrection)?

What question does he ask Peter? Why might he have asked three times? How might this have helped Peter on his path to come?

When you hear the question that is your question, then you have already begun to hear much. Whether you can accept the Bible's answer or not, you have reached the point where at least you can begin to hear it, too.

Buechner

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **Psalm 62:1-8**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

Mindful of *application of God's question* – “What are you doing here?”

- What has me running, exhausted, stuck? Why? What is at the core? How can awareness lead me to peace?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

VOICE

*The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.*

God's voice is over the waters.

The elements obey him. Completely. Miraculously.

Even to the point of water acting like solid ground at a molecular level.

God's voice creates, ignites and even quiets the waters.

Every storm - physical or spiritual - obeys Him.

And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And it was so. (Genesis 1:6, 7b)

"...and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." (Exodus 14:21)

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. (Mark 4:39)

God's voice is powerful and full of majesty.

God's voice "breaks the cedar of Lebanon" for He alone has dominion and authority over ALL - evidence of his power and goodness. The world's most powerful nations skip like calves at the sound of his voice.

God's voice flashes like flames of fire.

It shakes our wilderness (whatever our wasteland might be.)

God's voice speaks to us: "Fear not, I am with you"

NOTHING hides us from him.

Nothing is outside of his power and control.

Nothing can resist the sound of his voice.

God's voice gives life.

God's voice strips bare.

God's voice (God's alone) gives strength to his people.

God's voice speaks peace.

"Peace to you... My peace I give to you"

Lord, help us hear.

Help me to listen and to avail myself to your voice.

Help me hear your voice that thunders

Help me lean into your voice, sometimes a still, small whisper.¹



God questions?

“SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE?”

EZEKIEL 37:3

*We ask questions when we don't understand a matter.
God asks questions because He knows all matters infinitely.*

Israel Wayne

In *Surprised by Oxford*, Carolyn Weber recounts a dinner at the esteemed university where she sat next to a renowned heart surgeon from the US named Dr. Inchbald. Being that the physician’s field put him in countless life-and-death situations, he was asked by another guest about his view on God, science, and life. A portion of his response, an aha moment he had while literally holding someone’s heart, resonated with me.

“Well, as I was standing there, all the uncertainty of my life, the absurdity of all this death, and all our attempts to ward it off, came down to a pinprick of light—like the glint off the scalpel in my hand. . . .

“I’ve come to the conclusion that God is sovereign, even over science, and that I cannot pretend to fully know His ways. They really are mysterious, as the saying goes. And they are not of the mind of men, no matter how hard we try to wrap our minds about these ways. . . . But to cut to the chase,” Dr. Inchbald stated, “when I see death, I know it is wrong.”

“Obviously.” Dr. Rieland snickered.

“But really, really wrong. In-my-gut wrong,” Dr. Inchbald almost pleaded. “It was not meant to be. It was not meant for us. We were not built for it. Everything in my body, at a cellular level, let alone a metaphysical one, twists against it. Not just my death, but the death of every living thing.”

Maybe that’s why separation (physical or even relational) hurts so much. Maybe that’s why good-byes are so hard. We aren’t made for separation, but for life/together. Resurrection life that informs all things not alive – yesterday, today, tomorrow ... forever.

Do you feel/have you ever felt “dried up”, that “hope is lost”, you have no way out?

Is there a circumstance or situation or relationship that steals from rather gives life to you?

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge"

Eph. 3:17-19

Can these bones live?

"Son of man, can these bones live?" . . .

And I answered, "Lord you know."

God invites us to dwell in Life & Light

Begin with prayer, "Lord, open my eyes that I might see what you have to show me in your Word."

Read: **Ezekiel 37**

Begin with Context: 5 W's – who, what, when, where, why – write out contextual considerations that inform the story.

What does God's question and Ezekiel's response reveal about their relationship?

What does Ezekiel see? What does the LORD see?

What does the LORD proceed to do through Ezekiel? Why do you think He involves Ezekiel in the process?

By whose knowledge and power does this mysterious event take place? How is it demonstrated/what happens when Ezekiel speaks over the valley of bones and to the 4 winds?

What are dead bones in your life?

What can we learn about God’s power? his authority? Life & Light?

How can this inform your responses to the intro questions above? [Do you feel/have you ever felt “dried up”, that “hope is lost”, you have no way out? Is there a circumstance or situation or relationship that steals from rather gives life to you?]

God has power, even over life and death. The fact that God gives life should not surprise anyone. He is the maker of every living thing. 1 Samuel 2:6

For further consideration, of light & life dwelling within us,
Read: **John 15:15-31**

Quick - Context: 5 W’s – who, what, when, where, why. Ask the LORD to make clear his mystery and to bless you in the secret places you need soul-nourishment.

What can we learn from Jesus about life, peace, light, LIFE – its power in and over the things and ways of the world.

Who is the authority/power source? How does this inform Hope and our daily circumstances?

What does “dwelling” mean? How can his dwelling in us and our dwelling with him replace things like insecurity, calamity, fear, loss/lost with hope, security, abundance – found?

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

Scripture Search: If you have time, read **Psalm 56**. Make a list of what is revealed about God: who He is, the things He says/speaks, the things He does (explicit/implied), ...

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Mindful of *application of God's question* – “*Can these bones live?*”

- Where are you trusting that doesn't give life? How does God's question shine light on and inform these? How does God's question invite peace/settledness?
- What does the text teach me about God?
- What truths (or promises) do I need to claim?
- What thought(s) will I carry throughout the day/week?

Spend time in prayer, asking God to further reveal himself as you go forth this week.

DWELLING PLACE

"This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden."

Behold (look) (see) . . . "I AM FOR YOU"

GOD : acts for the sake of his Holy Name

God speaking:

I will give you a new heart
put within you a new spirit
remove your hard
stubborn
proud
arrogant
my way is best . . . heart
give you a soft
humble
tender
kind
settled . . . heart

I put my Spirit within you
. . . that you shall live

So you can be stable through Him
caring (to others, to yourself)
at peace (shalom peace)

God speaking:

I rebuild the ruined places
I am the LORD
I have spoken
I do it
IN ABUNDANCE

In Jesus, He has made a covenant of peace within you
In Jesus, he has set himself in your midst

FOREVERMORE

GOD dwells with me
. . . that I might dwell in Light and Life



If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to born both within ourselves and within the world; we would know that the Kingdom of God is what we all of us hunger for above all other things even when we don't know its name or realize that it's what we're starving to death for. The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers.

We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it.

Frederick Buechner

ⁱ Hudson, Trevor. Questions God Asks Us (p. 14). Upper Room Books. Kindle Edition.