



October 18 – November 22, 2020
Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions for Week 1: "Reflection"

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Read Matthew 11:28-30. In Jesus' view, religion should be personally refreshing, helpful and life-giving rather than pressure or a chore. In what ways do you find your own spiritual journey life-giving? In what ways can it seem like a chore? What do you think is the difference?
3. In this same passage, Jesus talks about weariness. How are you doing in that regard? What feels tiring or draining for you at the moment and why? How do Jesus' words impact you in that regard?
4. The speaker on Sunday suggested that most of us struggle to love ourselves adequately. How did you relate to that: would you say you love or even like yourself? What are some of the ways you struggle to love yourself and why? What are some things you like about yourself?
5. Read Matthew 22:36-40. Jesus seems to be saying that the summary of all spiritual practice is centered around three coordinates: love for God, love for others, and love for self. How does the way you view and interact with God help or hinder your love of self? How does the way you view and interact with others help or hinder your love of self?
6. Jesus called us to be compassionate, forgiving and accepting. Which of these do you find easiest to extend to yourself? Which do you find hardest? Read the following scriptures, and for each one discuss how applying it to the way we view ourselves could help us grow in self-love. Is there anything that inhibits you from applying these to yourself?
 - Matthew 9:35-36
 - Colossians 3:12-14
 - Matthew 9:11-13
7. Do this week's practice (below) together as a group for a few minutes, and then discuss afterwards how it went. What was easy and what was difficult about it? What made you feel comfortable and what made you feel uncomfortable?

Practice for this week: Self-compassion

In this exercise we are going to practice being present to ourselves in an intentionally compassionate way. Take a few minutes to do this each day.

Begin by reading the following scripture:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

(Matthew 9:35-36)

Sit quietly and comfortably and try to imagine being Jesus looking at all the people. Imagine the needs of the people you are seeing. Some of their problems are not their fault and beyond their control. Some of them are because of things they have done and mistakes they have made. Some of them are accidental and circumstantial. Allow understanding and compassion to well up.

Now try to look at yourself in the same way and with the same understanding and compassion. Focus on your breathing for a few moments, and be mindfully present to yourself. Who and what do you see? Be conscious of your thoughts and feelings about yourself—don't evaluate or analyze them, just be aware. Do you feel comfortable with yourself or uncomfortable? Notice any feelings of inadequacy or failure. Notice where you feel angry or annoyed at yourself. Don't withdraw from this discomfort, but continue to be present to yourself in it. Now consciously and intentionally be compassionate towards yourself as you would a friend in your situation. Each time you feel judgmental or less than compassionate, consciously return to compassion. Let go of any judgmental thoughts and simply accept yourself "as is." Surrender to the reality that in this moment you can be none other than who you are right now. Rest in this posture for a few minutes before ending.

Discussion Questions for Week 2: "Grounded"

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Did anything seem particularly relevant to your current circumstances?
2. What was your experience with the self-compassion exercise last week? Is there anything you would like to share about that?
3. How have your physical activities (meals, sleep, exercise, physical contact, etc.) changed under COVID, if at all? Do you think it matters? Why or why not? How do you feel about your body in general?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19. What does this verse mean to you? If God's Spirit lives in our bodies, how might that impact how we feel about them? Is there one way you can treat your body better this week?
5. Read Psalm 8:3-4. How do you like to engage with nature? How does this help you connect with God?
6. Numinous experiences are those "wow!" moments that suggest the presence of the divine. Share a time you experienced the numinous. How might you increase your awareness of God in the day-to-day ordinary things of life?
7. How has your experience of your home and your neighborhood changed (if at all) throughout the pandemic? How might you become more "rooted" in your home and neighborhood? How might this be a way of taking care of yourself?
8. Take some time to pray for one another about the things you have shared.

"Grounded" practices for this week:

The speaker on Sunday suggested a number of practices to take care of ourselves and center on God's love. Select one or two that resonate the most with you and set time aside this week to carry them out.

- **Engage with nature**—go for a hike or a drive, sit outside in the sunshine, do some gardening, play with an animal, etc. As you engage with nature, intentionally slow down your thinking and breathing. Live in the moment with heightened senses. What does nature reveal to you about God?
- **Experience beauty in the every day**—as you go through your day, look for beauty in the world around you. Imagine it is your first time seeing, touching, smelling, hearing or tasting something, and live as though "everything is a miracle" (Albert Einstein). How does this attitude change your perspective of the world, of yourself, and of God?
- **Become more rooted in your home**—the psalms say, "This day belongs to the Lord! Let's celebrate and be glad today" (Psalm 118:24). How can you celebrate a sense of place in your

home or neighborhood today, rather than waiting until things have returned to “normal”? Can you beautify your home or workspace? Can you create a new tradition? Can you safely practice community with your neighbors?

- ***Be kind to your body***—your body is a precious part of you. Is there anything you need to change about your daily routine to better care for your body? How can you do this as an act of worship?

Discussion Questions for Week 3: “Creativity”

1. Did you try any of the “grounded” practices from last week? What did you do and how did it go? Did you feel more connected to yourself, others around you, or God?
2. Read Genesis 1:27. What do you think it means to be made “in the image of God”? How does this relate to creativity? Do you ever feel closer to God when you are being creative? Explain.
3. Read Exodus 26:1-29. List all the different occupations and skills that would be needed to complete the building of the tabernacle as instructed. If you had lived at this time, how might you have contributed to this project? Are there any lessons we can take from this story?
4. The speaker on Sunday suggested that some of us resist making time to be creative because we feel we are “not very good at it” or because it feels like a trivial use of our time. Do you feel this way? Why or why not?
5. Read Isaiah 64:8. In what ways do you feel yourself to be a divine work of art? In what ways do you see others in your group this way? How might thinking of ourselves as God’s masterpieces impact how we view our own creativity?
6. Read Genesis 2:15, and 3:17-19. These passages present two very different perspectives of work. Which better reflects how you view the work (paid or unpaid) you have to do each day, and why? Is there anything you can do in your daily work to increase your sense of creativity and of working in harmony with God?
7. Look at the list of practices for the week below. Is there one (or more than one) you can commit to trying this week? Plan on sharing how it went with one another next time you meet. Then spend some time praying for one another to sense the creative joy of God during this week.

Practices for this week: Creative play

Creativity is not yet something else we *should* do—it is a gift. We are invited by God to play, to create, to imagine, and rethink, to let go of rules and boxes and the “proper” way of doing things, and have fun celebrating life. Look through the list below and see if there is something here (or something else not on the list) you can make time for this week to lose yourself in creative joy.

- *Go for a walk with your camera*—Have fun taking photos from interesting angles, getting close up to objects, or playing with the filters on your phone.
- *Play with paint*—Use watercolors to make swirls and patterns. Blow the paint with a straw, make a bubble painting, or add salt or rice when the paint is still wet (but after any “puddles” have disappeared) to make creative effects.
- *Eat something new*—Eat something you’ve never tried before, or try out a new recipe.
- *Tell stories*—Have each member of your family suggest a random adjective and noun—the sillier, the better (e.g., musical goldfish)—and tell a story that ties them all together.

- *Pray in color*—Write the names of people or situations that are weighing on your heart and doodle around them, praying any words that come to mind, or allowing the doodle to be a prayer in itself.
- *Repurpose something*—Find something that is broken and find a new purpose for it.
- *Do a brain dump*—Write down everything that comes into your head as one long stream of consciousness. Let it go off on wild, crazy tangents. Connections may (or may not!) appear later.
- *Play with Lego or Play-Doh*—Play like you would when you were a child, and allow your mind to wander.

Discussion Questions for Week 4: "Rest"

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Read Matthew 11: 28-30. Jesus talks about being tired and weary. How are you feeling at the moment in that regard? What is your general reaction to tiredness? Do you see it as a problem to be overcome or an indicator of the need to rest?
3. Read Genesis 2: 1-3. Why do you think rest is included in the creation story? What is the relevance of this to our understanding of humanity and the reality in which we live?
4. The speaker on Sunday suggested that we live in a sleep-deprived society and a culture where rest is viewed a luxury rather than a necessity. Spend some time in personal reflection on your own rest habits (it might help to journal your thoughts) and then share in discussion if you feel comfortable. What are some personal indicators that you are tired? Do you feel you get enough sleep? Do you take daily breaks in your schedule and a day off?
5. Now spend some time in personal reflection on why you think you have your current rest habits. The speaker in Sunday suggested some negative inner motivations that might inhibit us from resting. Here are some listed below but we are all different and there are many more. Reflect on what applies to you (again journaling might help) and then share in discussion, as you feel comfortable.
 - Finding our identity in what we do rather than who we are
 - Fear and insecurity (about what others think of us or what we think of ourselves)
 - Lack of appreciation or contentment with life as we have it
 - Taking ourselves too seriously - feeling we are indispensable and responsible for all the problems
 - Victim mentality – quietly enjoying the fact that we might get accolades for overworking and blaming/our circumstances as being out of control
6. After this part of the discussion spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for this week: Rest

This week simply choose one rest practice that you feel you could continue to practice sustainably in the future. This could be getting more sleep, taking a day off, taking a regular break in your day or taking (or scheduling) time off from work.

Discussion Questions for Week 5: "Friendship"

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. How did you relate to what the Mathers and Guedenets shared about friendships during the pandemic? Share a little about your own joys and struggles with this at the moment. In what ways have your friendships been more of a struggle? In what ways have they grown? What are some creative ways you have nurtured your friendships during these unusual times?
3. Read the scriptures from Proverbs below. After each one take a moment to reflect and then share with one another.

Just as lotions and fragrance give sensual delight, a sweet friendship refreshes the soul.

Proverbs 27:9 (The Message)

- What friendships are most precious to you at the moment? In what ways do they contribute to your own self-care?

Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.

Proverbs 18:24 (The Message)

- Do you have any friendships that are not "sticking" at the moment in the way you would like? Have some friendships "slipped"? How do you feel about that? Reflect on what might be the cause and whether you could take any action.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Proverbs 27: 6 (NIV)

- Can you think of a time when a close friend gave you feedback that you didn't like? How did you feel? How did your relationship change? What was the outcome?

4. The speaker on Sunday offered a few ways in which we might be able to take better care of our friendships during the pandemic. Take a moment to consider each one, with your reflections on the above scriptures in mind. How could you respond practically to each one? What are other ways you feel you could take care of yourself more through friendships?
 - Be proactive
 - i. Make the first move towards a friend rather than waiting for them.
 - ii. If you feel a lack of friendship, be the change you want to see—reach out as a friend.
 - Be vulnerable
 - i. Sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly of our lives can offer others an invitation to draw closer and do the same with us.
 - ii. Ask for help (rather than always being the helper) when you need it, and let friends know they are important to you—you need them!
 - Be committed
 - i. We are all stressed, a little "off," and maybe even weird at the moment, so let's stay patient with friends who are not quite themselves right now.
 - ii. Stay in friendships for the long haul and ride the ups and downs.

- Be considerate
 - i. What is the “run-off” or “fall-out” of our lives? What vibe do we put out (kindness/negativity, acceptance/criticism, enthusiasm/indifference, closeness/withdrawal, etc.)?
 - ii. Working at being our “best self” is the biggest gift we can give any friend.
5. After this part of the discussion spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for this week: Action of friendship

Take some time to determine an action of friendship you feel motivated to take after this week’s reflections. It might be reaching out to enjoy a friendship that already feels strong and rewarding. It might be restoring a treasured friendship that has drifted. It could be letting someone know how much you need them or asking for help. Remember the context (in this series) is self-care, so let your action be guided by that, and then make a point of doing it.