

Lenten Reflection Questions: From Fear to Love

*For individuals, families,
and small groups*

Reflection Questions

How to use these questions: Listed below are daily questions for individuals (I) and families (F) to use for discussion or for journaling. Small groups may find both sets useful.

Before beginning the daily devotions, take time to read the Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in Luke 15: 11-32.

ASH WEDNESDAY

- (I) Can you think of a time when you felt “lost?” What needed to happen for you to be “found?”
- (F) Can you remember a time when you were lost as a child? Share this experience with family members. What did it feel like the moment you realized you were lost? How did it feel when you were found? How does it feel to know that any time you feel lost, you are always found in the parental embrace of your heavenly Father?



THURSDAY

- (I) What is your earliest memory of God’s unconditional love? How was that love demonstrated to you?
- (F) How do you feel blessed in your life? Share this with others. Does your day consist of focusing on what’s on your calendar or your to do list? How can you change your focus?

FRIDAY

- (I) We often excel at pointing out the faults of others. What aspect in your own life needs to be healed?
- (F) Write on a piece of paper something about yourself that you don’t like to face or admit very often even to yourself. If you wish, share it with others. How can you let God help you with those places? Ask God for help to heal you.

SATURDAY

- (I) Do you find it difficult to be on the “receiving end” of the gifts of others? Why is that?
- (F) Is saying, “I need help” hard to say? What is something you need help with that you are afraid to ask someone for fear that they cannot help? Who in your life cares enough to help you? What can you do to make it easier for yourself to ask for help?

Before beginning the daily devotions this week, reread the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but consider it from the point of view of the younger son.

Week 1

1st SUNDAY IN LENT

- (I) Are there times when, confronted with temptation, you have intentionally chosen to be aligned with Jesus and resist the path of “upward mobility?” What can you do to have your reflection be more like Jesus more often?
- (F) Look at yourselves in a mirror. Share one thing that pleases you about your reflection. How do we reflect Jesus? What can you do to have your reflection be more like Jesus more often?

MONDAY

- (I) Do you think there might be other categories of love besides the author’s definitions of “first love” and “second love?” How would you describe them?
- (F) Have you ever expected an “unconditional, total, self-giving love” from another person and been disappointed? What would it do to your relationship with that person if you took that burden off of them? How can you let God fill that need for unconditional love?

TUESDAY

- (I) If you’re a parent, how was it (or how do you think it will be) “letting go” of your children? If you’re not a parent, how was (or how do you foresee) your own leave-taking? What did the “return” feel like?
- (F) When is a time you have left someone? How did it feel to leave people you loved? How did it feel when you returned? Did it feel the way you thought it would? Share your experience.

WEDNESDAY

- (I) Do you find that you learn more from your successes or your failures? Why is that? Who was there to support you?
- (F) When was a time you took a risk that did not turn out as you had hoped? To whom did you turn for help before starting again? How were you received: loved and embraced or with a “I told you so?” What can you learn from how God embraces us with love in a lifetime of ‘do over’s”?

THURSDAY

- (I) How’s life going for you so far? Has it worked out the way you had it planned, or have there been some “interruptions” along the way? How do you interpret those alterations?
- (F) When was the last time you did not get something you wanted? A job, a love, a spot on the team, a grade in class? Was your thought, “If I only had that, I would be happy(er)?” What would change if your thought was, “God has other plans for me and I will be grateful and patient to live into those plans?”

FRIDAY

- (I) It’s possible to be lonely in the midst of a crowd. What are the conditions that make for your times of loneliness? How do you work through them?
- (F) Have you ever written a love poem? Together write a love poem to God and post it in your home. Does this make you feel closer to Him?

SATURDAY

- (I) Back in the 70’s, Kris Kristofferson sang: “Everybody’s got to have somebody to look down on.” What does that say about “loving your enemies?”
- (F) Who in your life is the hardest to love? Why? Do you show them love and mercy? Why or why not? What would happen if we truly tried to love them unconditionally, despite their difficult nature and resistance? How can we get better at this?



Before beginning the daily devotions this week, reread the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but consider it from the point of view of the elder son.

Week 2

2nd SUNDAY IN LENT

- (I) “All I have is yours.” Is there anyone to whom you have spoken those words? What are the implications of that statement?
- (F) What did your parents teach you? Have you passed it on to your children or kept it to yourself? What has your Father taught you? Have you taught it to others or kept it to yourself? What does it mean to give all that you have?

MONDAY

- (I) What lessons of faith have you learned from times of hardship and suffering?
- (F) In the age of technology, it is easier to disregard people because our relationships are over computer screens and not in person. What are ways we can combat this tendency to build walls between us and other people? How can we feel “immense compassion” for those who are hardest to love?

TUESDAY

- (I) To what or whom do you “listen with great attention?” Why does that source deserve your obedience?
- (F) What do we miss when we aren’t listening? To whom do you listen attentively? How can you take the time in your existing schedule to listen to God? (Hint: try it while you are working out, in the shower, right before you fall asleep.)

WEDNESDAY

- (I) “Fear not?” What are the fears that occupy your mind & spirit, and how might the love of God dispel them?
- (F) What do you fear? Do you fear being rejected? Who do you not talk to out of fear? How can knowing that God loves us unconditionally give you the courage to reach out?

THURSDAY

- (I) The elder brother was “bound by resentment.” What keeps your spirit bound or captive, and what would it take to set you free?
- (F) Whom do you resent? A friend, a sibling, a parent? Why do you resent them? Letting go of a resentment is not for the benefit of the other person. Letting go of the resentment is for you. What are steps you can take to stop feeling resentful?



FRIDAY

- (I) What’s the difference between being righteous and being self-righteous?
- (F) Think of a time when you felt another person did something wrong but didn’t get in trouble for it. How did that make you feel? If you have done something and not gotten caught, how would you want to be treated?

SATURDAY

- (I) Do we really want to welcome everyone at the banquet table, or do we think—unlike the waiting father—that some should be excluded?
- (F) Regardless of what position you hold in your particular family, pretend you are the youngest child. How does that change how you see them and their role? Do the same thing with the eldest child and then the parent role. What important part does each family member play in the lives of the others?

Before beginning the daily devotions this week, reread the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but consider it from the point of view of the father.

Week 3

3rd SUNDAY IN LENT

- (I) Someone said, “When you walk a mile in another person’s shoes, the good thing is that you end up a mile away from them with a new pair of shoes.” How can we better come to understand the struggles and plights of others?
- (F) It is easy to be angry at and condemn people for their actions. We all know people or learn about people who make choices that we would never make. How can we still love those people who do things we cannot accept? How can we learn more about why they made those choices? It is important to remember that loving the person does not condone the behavior; God sent Jesus to show us how.

MONDAY

- (I) An old faith question: “If being a follower of Jesus were against the law, would there be enough evidence in your life to convict you?” Where do others see Christ in you?
- (F) What does it mean to claim that God is within you? Have each family member share how their actions speak out about how God is in him or her.

TUESDAY

- (I) Honesty in our relationships breaks down the barriers that can so often separate us from the candid, truthful sharing of life’s struggles and joys. How does the love of God set us free and enable this to happen?
- (F) Think about your siblings. They can bring blessings and difficulties. Focus on the positives and share with each other the blessings that siblings can bring to your life.

WEDNESDAY

- (I) Had you ever considered the denial by Peter in the same category as the betrayal by Judas? Do you see some sins as “unforgivable?”
- (F) Is there a part of your life that is a constant struggle or that you are having problems with right now? How does recalling that you are a child of God make it easier to deal with the situation?

THURSDAY

- (I) Do you have a “safe place” to which you like to retreat? What are its characteristics? Does it feel safe because of the place or the presence of another?
- (F) Where do you feel safe? Do a nightly family devotion snuggled in mom and dad’s bed or on the couch. Have a family hug and talk about the feeling of comfort and safety in that moment. Explain to children that God’s love embraces them at all times and they can remember that feeling and use it to feel comforted in difficult situations.



FRIDAY

- (I) What is the primary determining factor in defining your identity? How do you identify yourself? What does it mean to be a child of God?
- (F) Our culture many times defines us by what we own. “Things,” however, do not define who we are. Discuss how each person in your family would like to be identified. What comes first? What is the most important? How do we live to show this?

SATURDAY

- (I) What situation would you point to as your “moment of deepest suffering?” What had you lost? What did you find?
- (F) In what situations do we tend to criticize, judge, or condemn others? Is this a reflection of God? Who sins more, the person we condemn or us for judging?

Before beginning the daily devotions this week, reread the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Consider it from the point of view of the servants.

Week 4

4th SUNDAY IN LENT

- (I) Do you feel you always get what you deserve? Do you deserve more or less than what God has given?
- (F) When was the last time someone gave you a gift? How did you receive it? With excitement? Gratitude? Entitlement? What did you do with that gift? How do we receive the gift of unconditional love given freely by God? What does it look like when we use this gift?



MONDAY

- (I) Accepting a gift is not always easy. Have you learned how to do that without protesting?
- (F) We talk a lot about how to love and forgive others, but how well do we forgive ourselves? For what do you still feel guilt? How do we remember the unconditional love God gives us, so that we can love ourselves, let go of our guilt and forgive ourselves?

TUESDAY

- (I) With whom do you share your table? With whom would you be *willing* to share your table, people who, thus far, have not been included?
- (F) Have you ever invited someone who was alone to sit at your lunch table? Have you ever *excluded* someone on purpose? How do you think each felt? Jesus was willing to include all. How can we remember that everyone is our brother and sister in Christ? How would remembering that change our relationship with “others”?

WEDNESDAY

- (I) If Jesus “makes a home with us” how do we share that home; what kind of hospitality do we offer or will we offer to others?
- (F) The Spirit is God’s breath, dwelling within us, offering us the same intimacy and mutual love that exists between the Father and Son. For tonight’s devotion, offer a dinner time prayer thanking God for the continued gift of his Holy Spirit, nurturing our faith and sending us strength, love, and healing.

THURSDAY

- (I) Which is more tolerable: to suffer the consequences of our own bad decisions, or to suffer injustices because of a faithful witness to Christ?
- (F) Recall a time when you showed love to someone to give them hope, cheer them up, show support. How did they react? What would it be like if we all showed that same love to even those we don’t like?

FRIDAY

- (I) How do you allow the judgments of others to define you? How do you/might you prevent that from happening?
- (F) It can feel uncomfortable or boastful to talk about loving ourselves. Let’s remember that it’s God who made us special, in his image, and we love ourselves because God first loved us. At your dinner table, take turns telling each person why you love them.

SATURDAY

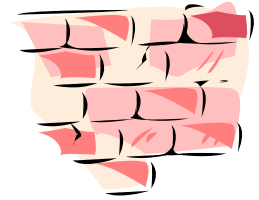
- (I) Acting or re-acting may well be our initial response to a crisis. How do these words present a healthier, more faithful way of responding? How might they work for you?
- (F) Remember when you were younger and someone kicked or hit you. What was the first impulse to do? Kicking them back seems like a logical answer. Revenge is so easily justified when we feel wronged. However, God is asking us to love and forgive. How can we follow what God would have us do?

Before beginning the daily devotions this week, reread the Parable of the Prodigal Son. With which person do you most identify? Why?

Week 5

5th SUNDAY IN LENT

- (I) Are God's blessings individual or communal? Are they meant for us alone or are they to be shared with others? We know the temptation to hang onto things for ourselves, but have we not also experienced the joy of multiplying those blessings in the company of others? What's a particular blessing you have a hard time sharing?
- (F) We all put up walls around ourselves to feel safe and protected. What actions, words, etc are the stones of this wall made from? How do we dismantle these walls to make room for more people in our relationships?



MONDAY

- (I) Where do you "belong?" What are the groups, the relationships, the connections that truly make you feel "this is where I belong?"
- (F) Read together as a family Psalm 23. Share which images each person particularly likes. Remind everyone that God is always with them.

TUESDAY

- (I) What do you expect? Do others "owe" you? Are they obligated to recognize and reward you? In what ways do you catch yourself with the attitude of the "elder son?"
- (F) Have you ever given a gift and not received a thank you? Ask yourself if you gave the gift because you were looking for something in return, like thank you, or did you give the gift out of unconditional love? What would God say?

WEDNESDAY

- (I) How much love does forgiveness require? Are you more interested in getting even or getting a broken relationship healed?
- (F) Try this children's activity. Take two cups, one bigger than the other. Fill the larger cup with water. Tell the children that the water is the love God has for them. The small cup is them. Put the small cup in a larger bowl or deep platter. Pour the water from the larger cup into the small cup letting it overflow. Explain that the water overflowed because the love God gives us is so much that we have love left over to give to others. Who does God want us to give this love to? How do we show God's love to others?



THURSDAY

- (I) Where does gratitude lead? - Sometimes to accumulation and hoarding. Sometimes to generosity and giving. What would you do with 5 loaves and 2 fish?
- (F) What are you thankful for today? How can you share what you are grateful for with others?

FRIDAY

- (I) Where do you find fulfillment and satisfaction in your life?
- (F) Our society sends us the message that we all should want and have the next best thing. How can we move from being fulfilled by these earthly things to being grateful for what has been given us? How do we teach our children this lesson?

SATURDAY

- (I) In our world we admire the people who are "pro-active." Jesus doesn't always fill this bill, does he? Do you?
- (F) Troubles come into everyone's life. How can we follow Jesus' example in dealing with them?

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, is your relationship with the Father more like the elder son or the younger son?

Holy Week

PALM SUNDAY

- (I) What do you learn from Jesus' example of integrity, authenticity, and love? How would you convey that to someone you love?
- (F) Who are you? What does it mean to be a child of God? Pass out a paper to each person. Put your name at the top and underneath, "Child of God." Pass the paper around and have everyone add characteristics to each other's papers that make them a child of God.



MONDAY

- (I) Can you think of some of your own life experiences where love has been multiplied by giving it away?
- (F) Do people have to earn your love? What are ways that we can practice freely giving it away?

TUESDAY

- (I) Loving those who don't want to be loved or are otherwise "unlovable," present challenges of their own. What were the circumstances that led to the time when it was most difficult for you to love someone?
- (F) Have you ever experienced loving someone or trying to be someone's friend and they reject you? What was your response? What would be God's response? How can we be more like him?

WEDNESDAY

- (I) The limits of love remind us of our need for God's unlimited, unconditional love. How have you experienced God's love most completely?
- (F) Who needs your forgiveness today? What steps do we need to take to be in a place to forgive them? How can we teach forgiveness to our children? How can we use God's love for us to help?

MAUNDY THURSDAY

- (I) Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave the loaves and said "This is my body. . . given for you." It is all "given for us." Why do we choose sometimes to not "receive?"
- (F) If the love of God is overflowing on those around us, then some of this love is overflowing onto you. How can we be open to receiving this love?

GOOD FRIDAY

- (I) In one of his books, our devotional author referred to Jesus as "the wounded healer." Do you have wounds that have yet to heal? What is preventing the healing from taking place?
- (F) Just as God loves us even though we are not perfect, we can in turn love others who are imperfect. Find a toy that is broken but that the child still uses. Talk about how the toy is broken but you still love it. Then talk about how just like we still love the partially broken toy, we love each other even though we are broken and sometimes make mistakes that hurt feelings.

SATURDAY

- (I) Remember who you are as a beloved child of God. How can you convey this profound truth to others as you share the hope of Easter?
- (F) Alleluia! When have you said, "Alleluia," because you came through a difficult situation. Give thanks! Alleluia. We are no longer afraid.

