



Fall 2009

We are pleased this quarter to introduce Bill White to many of you and are glad that you will get to 'taste' the way the Lord speaks through him.

GOOD QUESTIONS

BY BILL WHITE

Several years ago I was getting ready to leave the house early on a Saturday morning to attend a weekend parenting conference Gordon was leading. My son, who was around eight at the time stopped me with shock and alarm – Saturday morning was our regular time to go out for breakfast, wrestle in the den, and hang out with each other. “Where are you going, Dad?!” he demanded of me. “Oh, sorry, son,” I fumbled to explain, “I’m going to a church to hear a talk that’s going to help me become a better dad.” I thought it was a nice recovery, and totally expected him to open the door for me since he was going to reap the benefits of my soon to be acquired skills and wisdom. “But you’re already a good dad. Stay here and play with me.” Before I could bask in what I thought was a “Hallmark Theater” moment between a father and his son, he quickly followed up with another question, “Are they going to teach about discipline?” Somewhat thrown by his inquiry, I tentatively offered, “Uh, no, I don’t think so.” “Oh then,” he replied, his voice renewed with energy, “you can go, then. See Ya’,” and then bounded out of the room to wake up one of his sisters to play, showing zero remorse over my exit.

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We get questions from others like, why do you get so angry all the time? Why can’t you just be happy? Where’s the report you said would be ready And we ask ourselves questions like, “What if my health keeps getting worse?” “What if my marriage never gets any better than it is now? What if my kids don’t turn out the way I think they should? What if I get to the end of my life and I need more money, but am unable to work?”

Jesus once asked his disciples a question, and quite frankly, I’m still not comfortable with the directness of it, though I’ve read and pondered it many times. Jesus had just finished telling a large group of people in John 6 that he was the “bread of life,” and that they must feast upon Him so as to abide in Him. Some in the crowd said this was difficult to understand, and were grumbling about it among themselves. Many commentators think this was their displeasure over the realization that Jesus’ mission wasn’t to free them from the oppression of the Roman government. They wanted a conquering hero, not a crucified Savior. And Jesus called them on it, saying that His words were spirit and life, that there were many who were following him around, but didn’t want to trust Him. As a result, many of those following Jesus withdrew and no longer walked with him

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I know Jesus wasn’t into gathering crowds, but I have to admit, that makes me uneasy. I don’t ever want to see someone stop following Jesus for any reason. But that’s not nearly as troubling to me as what he immediately asked his disciples after the crowd turned away from Him. I know what I would have said: “Hey guys, hold on! Don’t let the crowd’s departure get to you! They misunderstood me. What I really meant was . . . now hang in there with me,” hoping to secure what remained of my

following. But Jesus seemingly does the opposite. Turning to the twelve he inquires of them, “Do you want to go away also?”

Whoa! What kind of a question is that? If we didn’t know Jesus’ character and His love for His disciples, it almost sounds like He’s inviting them to leave, even daring them. That’s not what I would have asked at that very moment. Though the text doesn’t explicitly say so, I think Jesus knew the disciples were somewhat caught up in the pageantry that surrounded Jesus in his early period of ministry. I know how easy it is for me to get caught up in following Christ for selfish reasons, and not even realize it. The Lord asks challenging questions of us to get to the core of what’s in our heart, which he already knows anyway.

But let’s not forget, Jesus exposes our hearts because of His deep love for us. That’s so unlike our culture. Hordes of paparazzi follow celebrities around, clamoring to get an unflattering and demeaning photograph that will be on display in every supermarket line in the country. The exposure tears the celebrity down, and society loves the shaming and humiliation of another, or it wouldn’t sell. Or think about the kind of questions we ask of those we love: “Did you forget to clean up your room again?!!” Or, “What did you just say to me?!!” Questions like that are meant to expose, but with a different intent than Jesus. People let us down. They fail to meet our expectations. We get angry and disappointed. We ask them why, demanding a reason so that they will feel shame and often we’re demanding they pay us back with their own misery for the pain and disappointment they’ve caused us.

But Jesus asks questions for a different reason. He asks questions to which He already knows the answer to expose what’s in our hearts, so we would see our strategies for what they are, see the folly in them, and turn to Him in greater faith. He wants us to see what He already sees: that we’re so inclined to put our hope in anything but Him, things which seemingly bring peace and confidence, but ultimately distance us from Him. Consider these questions the Lord asks in His Word:

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Matthew 6:27

“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” Matthew 7:3

“ But Jesus, aware of this, said, ‘O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?’” Matthew 16:8

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” Matthew 16:26 (ESV)

There is an initial sense of shame when we hear these questions from Jesus. We’re exposed and it is revealed that our heart craves something other than Him. Like Adam, we’re tempted to “sew for ourselves fig leaves” and try to keep our motives hidden from others and ourselves until our lack of functional faith in Jesus seems normal. And we expose the sin of others in order to demand from them that our anger and frustration be satisfied by their shame; and yet the Lord’s righteous anger is already fully and forever satisfied by the cross. There is no condemnation for those in Christ. In the gospel, exposure from the Lord eventually emerges as a gracious kindness.

I love the way Tim Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Church in Manhattan describes this freedom, “In religion our only hope is to live a good enough life for God to bless us. Therefore every instance of sin and repentance is traumatic, unnatural, and horribly threatening. Only under great duress does a religious person admit they have sinned – because their only hope is their moral goodness. But in the gospel, the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ makes it easier to admit we are flawed (because we know we won’t be cast off if we confess the true depths of our sinfulness.) Our hope is in Christ’s righteousness, not our own – so it is not traumatic to admit our weaknesses and lapses.”

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If we really grasped this and believed it, we might even welcome the Lord’s questions in our lives. We would see them more for what they are: an invitation to put off our false hopes and move closer to the Lord in genuine faith. “Do you want to go away also?” Consider Peter’s answer, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” I love his answer because it’s so different from the brash zeal and confidence we sometimes see in Peter’s responses. In Luke 22 when Jesus revealed to him that he would come under attack from the evil one, Peter answers in his own “Lord I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33) - so sure of his resolve and dedication. And Yet we all know how this turned out – Jesus essentially responded with, “no, Peter, actually, you’ll soon repeat-

edly deny you even know me.” How often I’m more confident in my own zeal rather than Jesus’ faithfulness!

But Peter’s answer to Jesus’ “invitation” to leave with the others is strong, even though his words seem more tentative. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” His response, while not bold and zealous has an air of sobriety to it, perhaps an even deeper discovery of what is real and enduring. We can almost hear inside Peter’s head, “wow, the crowds are getting smaller, and Jesus just asked us if we wanted to go with them. . . . but what if we did? Where would that get us? There is only one truth, and He is standing right before us. To walk away may relieve some of the pressure, but it would ultimately be pure foolishness “

Jesus’ question was not to gather information, but to draw something deeper, something better out of Peter and the other disciples. They didn’t understand His motives at the time. It probably sounded harsh. But Jesus’ question was rooted in His deep love and complete commitment to the disciples. They would have been wrong to look at his question through the lens of his tone, or their surrounding circumstances.

Do you hear Jesus asking you these kinds of questions through His word and in prayer? Do your circumstances seem hard? Does it seem like the Lord is being hard on you in the midst of your situation? Jesus calls something deeper from us with His questions: He knows we will run to other things as our source of life and hope. Even though I do this all too frequently, I am so grateful He asks me hard questions that expose my misplaced trust. I am growing in my openness to those questions because I am becoming more convinced they are rooted in His love for me and His promises to me. And I am learning to discern between questions that are asked with the goal of punishing or shaming me, and ones that are encouraging me to trust more deeply in the Lord, and it makes me want to ask those kinds of questions of others.

Why not pause this week and critique some of your questions? Do they reveal your inner motivation, or what is going on in your heart? Do they serve to lead the person to look more toward Jesus, or more toward satisfying your anger or disappointment? Reflect on how Jesus pursues you out his love and commitment to you. As I more deeply consider how he satisfied God’s wrath toward my own sin, I begin to require this less from others concerning their sin against me.

DAYMARK NEWS



Please remember to continue to pray for Julie, Bill, Sharla and Gordon as they work for Daymark.

Pray that Bill’s counseling load will continue to grow. As you refer people to Daymark please remember that in addition to Julie and Gordon, Bill is on staff and available to meet with people. Those you refer will be more willing to consider Bill if you mention his name. We are still looking to provide a car for Bill and as a non-profit organization such a donation is tax deductible.

Julie will be leading a retreat in Mentone, AL on November 6-7. For Julie working on the material has been both exciting and overwhelming. “A common pattern in my own life,” Julie says,” as well as many of the women I counsel, is that we often focus our energy toward excess management of others, with little understanding of the unique calling that God has for or own lives .” The retreat, yet untitled, will seek to free women from controlling others while they embrace the unique role that God has both called them to and equipped them for... whatever their season of life. Pray for protection of her time and her family and for clarity in the message God would have her deliver.

Pray for Gordon as he continues to write and counsel. He has made significant progress on his book and is at the point where he is trying to move towards publishing. In the next several months he will be trying to find a literary agent to help him. Pray for discernment and for an agent that connects with Gordon’s book and wants to see it published.

In addition to the retreat Julie is doing there have been several teaching opportunities for the Daymark staff this fall. Bill, Julie and Gordon are doing a six week workshop to help train ‘care team’ leaders at Shades Valley Community Church. Gordon will be speaking at the Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church Women’s Fall Fellowship. He will be addressing the topic of spiritual gifts helping women to understand the “The Power of Weakness in a World of False Strength.”

RESOURCES

We wanted to make our readers aware of two resources for men in the Birmingham area that help them deal with heart issues that have manifested in an addiction to pornography and/or sex:

- The Band of Brothers is a Christ-centered recovery group for men that meets at Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church on Monday nights at 6:30 PM. For more information, email James Justice at jdjustice1@charter.net or Traylor Lovvorn at traylor@traylorlovvorn.com.
- Encounter is a ministry that also offers a recovery group plus provides ministry for the affected marriages. For information on Encounter go to www.setheartsfree.com.



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Daymark Pastoral Counseling

WWW.DAYMARKCOUNSELING.COM

For more information about Daymark Pastoral Counseling please visit our website:

Christian maturity often involves responding to good questions more than securing tangible answers.



P.O. Box 59768 Birmingham, AL 35259

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