



*Gregg Koskela*

Questions, questions. Asking ourselves the right questions can be a huge help in regularly feeding our relationship with Jesus. At Newberg Friends (Oregon), we did a sermon series exploring the queries of Northwest Yearly Meeting. The devotionals this week were adapted from that series.

I've been married to Elaine for almost 21 years, and we are the parents of Talli (almost 17), Hayley (14) and Aubrey (almost 9).

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 16:24-26*

One day my daughter came home from the neighbors' house, tears in her eyes, with a new haircut—a very ragged and short cut given by another child. My poor little girl, victimized! I was ready to go for blood...but instead, I asked a question.

“Did *you* cut anyone's hair?”

“I don't want to talk about that right now.”

Ahh! One right question at the right time, and my whole understanding of the situation changed completely.

Early Quakers were unique in *not* developing a standard set of beliefs. Statements of faith are fine, but they don't lead us to immediately consider how to live out our beliefs. But a question can bring engagement and application. Friends used queries—or thoughtful questions—from their beginnings, but they don't get the attention they should in evangelical Friends circles. So at our weekly pastoral team meeting, I excitedly brought an overview of a sermon series on the queries—and was greeted with a lukewarm response. One team member said, “It just seems like the questions are all too leading. I can go down the list and say ‘yes, yes, yes, no.’ It doesn't really help me much.”

Then Steve Fawver turned it around for us. He made the simple suggestion of putting “how” in front of each of the queries. “*How* do you live in vital relationship with God?” forces me to examine my life and come up with specifics that help me actually live out my life with God.

This week, we'll explore a few of our yearly meeting's queries. I encourage you to find your own and put them into regular practice in your life.

*SONG: He Leadeth Me*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: God, what question do you have today for me?*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Colossians 2:6-7*

Many of us want a vital relationship with God. Not a religion. Not a list of rules. Not just a belief system. We want the tools to move us toward this goal: living in a vital relationship with God.

In high school, my youth pastor put this passage from Colossians 2 on the back of our youth group T-shirts. He challenged us to memorize it, to live it, to be ready to share it.

“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord...” It was in high school that I realized something for the first time, something that now seems so obvious I wonder why I didn’t get it sooner. As a child, I had asked Jesus into my heart as my savior, which at the time really meant I wanted to be in heaven with Jesus forever and never go to hell. I prayed it, and I was done. But in high school I saw all through the Bible that Jesus challenged people to live as he did, to obey him, to follow him, to do what he had done. He wanted to be Lord, in charge, the one we obey and mold our lives after.

A vital relationship with God has this as the starting point: Just as you received him as Lord, continue to live in him.

Have you received him as Lord? Have you made the decision to live with Jesus in charge, calling the shots, and committed to changing your life pattern and habits to be in line with what Jesus wants? It’s step one!

*How do you live in vital relationship with God, trusting in Jesus Christ as saving Lord, and obey the leadings of the Holy Spirit?*

*SONG: Here I Am, Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, thank you for saving me. I will choose to obey you—you are my Lord!*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: 1 Timothy 6:17-20a*

How are you responsible in handling money and property entrusted to you? (This is a shortened version of one of our yearly meeting's queries).

We each have differing amounts of money and stuff, but we all are asked by the master: "What are you doing with the things I've entrusted to your care?"

The apostle Paul challenges us to do something good with what we have! Having a deep trust in God's ability to care for us is really the only way to get to true stewardship—which is using what God has entrusted to us for our enjoyment and to help others.

Clearly Paul is aiming much farther than a grudging generosity after we've gotten enough for ourselves! There are several word plays in these verses: Those who are *rich* should set their hope not on uncertain *riches* but on God who *richly* gives all things. Rather they should be *rich* in good deeds.

Are you handling God's stuff correctly? When we notice and thank God for the many ways he does richly bless us, it helps! We build a firm foundation on our God who is trustworthy, rather than a well-paying but easily lost job or the vagaries of the stock market. That frees the miser in us to ask God how he wants us to use what we have, without living in fear that we will run out.

*SONG: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

*PRA YER SUGGESTION: Holy Spirit, give me God's heart of generosity.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Luke 14:28-30*

How are you true to your promises...and prompt in paying your debts?

We live in a culture that has become comfortable with debt. Credit comes easily; we can walk out of a store or off a car lot with something we could never purchase without a loan. If you've gotten in trouble with debt, you are not alone. My hope is to perhaps help people who haven't yet gotten in trouble to think carefully about the purchases they make.

When I was in seminary, we took out what seemed like a lot in school loans (now, I'm sure the numbers would be even higher.) But I remember that the very act of borrowing that much money, borrowing money for something that Elaine and I had asked God about, did not have a good effect on me. Since we were already thousands of dollars in debt, what was movie and dinner on a credit card in comparison?

We made some choices in our spending then that had an effect on us for years to come. About six months before I turned 30, I remember making some significant commitments to change: first, to talk more regularly with Elaine about our finances, rather than hide like I had been doing; and second, to make better choices with the little things we spent money on and to work to repay our debts.

If I had the chance at age 29 ½ to go back to my early 20-something self, I would have asked a lot of questions and raised a few eyebrows at the purchasing choices I made back then. It makes me wonder how we could do a better job in the church helping each other with choices *before* we get into trouble.

*SONG: I Surrender All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, help me think before I buy; help me ask you for wisdom.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 5:12-15*

How do you use your free time in ways that refresh your spirit?

The first response many of us have is, “What free time?” Our culture is busy, busy, busy. When I think about myself, I realize that what I often do is waste time, rather than use it to refresh my spirit.

God cares for us enough to want us to refresh ourselves, not see ourselves as human “doings.” The whole idea of Sabbath shows God’s heart—not as a taskmaster, but as the great Creator who longs to spark creativity in his creation!

When Moses speaks the Ten Commandments again to the people at the end of his life, the command is to *observe* or *honor* the Sabbath, you and your slaves and all your animals. Why? Because the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt and God brought them all out of captivity. Sabbath is a reminder—and maybe even a protest—that we are all rescued from the unending need to produce things to be consumed.

Are you prone to overwork, and need to figure out how to say no? Perhaps then your biggest task is to take your calendar and start marking off regular times to refresh your spirit. Your biggest task might be saying “no” to work and make free time happen.

Perhaps that’s not your biggest struggle. Perhaps where this question challenges you is in the way you waste time, where the free time you have gets frittered away in solitaire or mindless television viewing or endless texting. Choose to refresh your spirit!

*SONG: Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, I want to live in a way that shows my time is yours.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Colossians 3:23*

How do you live out your Christian values with your work? Would you accept a lower standard of living to do so?

In his journal, John Woolman, a Quaker from the 1700s, gives some pretty challenging examples of how he chose to live out Christian values, no matter the consequences.

When he was an apprentice, his master sold a slave and asked John to write out the receipt as part of his job. Woolman wasn't the one selling the slave. But when he went ahead and wrote out the receipt, ignoring the warnings in his mind and heart, it bothered him so much he decided he could never do that again. He told that to his master, risking the apprenticeship, in order to live out his values.

Later in life, Woolman was quite respected as a tailor, and because of that, he had many opportunities for work and made a good living. There came a time where God's call on his life demanded more time outside of work. He was willing to cut back on the jobs he would take on, accepting a lower standard of living in order to be obedient to what God was asking him to do.

Now, I'm not saying a higher salary automatically means you are not following God. Rather, I'm holding up John Woolman as an example of someone who placed God's values higher than his own standard of living.

When push *does* come to shove...are you and I willing to let God's push win over business? Over money? Over prestige? Over acclaim? These are the questions that get at our priorities. These are the questions that make us think.

*SONG: Have Thine Own Way*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, help me have a clear head to make decisions in the workplace based on your teachings.*

—Gregg Koskela

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 22:1; Matthew 6:19-24*

Integrity is a powerful Christian value—doing what’s right, being honest, even if no one else notices, even if it costs you.

A friend of mine is a plumber, and someone who models integrity. He updated his status on Facebook to say he had to “remove and replace 150’ of new pipe we installed yesterday. When finishing the job, we discovered the supplier gave us the wrong pipe (not for potable water). Now it’s back to Tigard for the right pipe and then to Dayton to re-do our work.”

Nobody would have noticed. Pipes are hidden in the walls, you know. It probably would have been okay; the pipe was good pipe, more expensive than what they needed, but not approved for that use. Pulling it out and re-doing it was my friend’s way of living out the Christian value of integrity.

*How do you live out your Christian values with your work? Would you accept a lower standard of living to do so?*

Wouldn’t it be great to be known as people who live out what we value? Let Scripture be a guide for you. A good name *is* better than riches! You really *can’t* serve two masters. If money is your goal, it will become your master.

Be a person who is trustworthy. If you say you will do something, do it. Go the extra mile. Let’s be people who live out the values of Jesus Christ!

*SONG: Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Holy Spirit, help me have the courage to do what is right and live what I believe.*

—Gregg Koskela