

Five Steps to a Faith that Works

Step One - Asking the Right Questions

Have you ever noticed how many questions children ask? They do that because they need to, because so much is new to them, and strange, and unfamiliar. And because children are naturally curious!

A healthy environment is one that encourages children and *adults* to ask critical and important questions. Some of us grew up in healthy environments, in church or at home that encouraged our questions, some of us did not. Most of us experienced mixed messages, knowing perhaps, that there were some questions we just should not ask!

Talking Point

- **Remember when you were a young person and you would ask for anything you wanted! It was okay to ask Santa, the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy for things and believe you would receive your wish. Share an experience you had based on this "belief".**
-

The trouble is, as adults we are expected to have all the answers. Or as we grow up, we are expected to suppress our questioning, to be content with the same, old, sometimes "pat," answers.

To have a healthy faith is to have the freedom and encouragement to ask questions, some of which may have easy answers, some of which may not. Rev. Troy Perry, the Founder of MCC would say, "I never want to belong to a church where I cannot ask a question, even if, to some people, it seems like a stupid question." Troy grew up in a religious environment that discouraged questioning church doctrines, teachings, practices or leaders.

In MCC, we treasure our freedom and our diversity. We can question our church leaders, locally and denomination-wide. Hopefully, we can disagree with them without being ostracized or kicked out of the church. We can tolerate a wide range of views, and yet still feel strongly about our own opinions. We can change our minds, we can grow spiritually.

Talking Point

- **Share with the group a belief or question you had that was "different" from that of your previous church/faith experience.**
 - **Is the Metropolitan Community Church ideal of freedom and diversity true of your experience? And, how does this impact your spiritual growth?**
-

Did you know that the Bible is full of questions? Some of these questions have answers, some allude to answers, some are rhetorical. Here is a list to jog your memory:

- “God has shown you, O human, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you?” (Micah 6: 8)
- “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)
- “Am I my brother’s keeper? (Genesis 4:9)
- “What mean these stones?” (Joshua 4:6)
- “When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or in prison?” (Matthew 25:37)
- “Is there balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole?” (Jer. 8:22)
- “Woman, why are you weeping?” (John 20:15)
- “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)
- “Are you the One, or should we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3)
- “Which is the greatest commandment?” (Matthew 22:36)
- “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” (Luke 10:36)
- “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4)
- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22/Mark 15:34)
- “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:27)
- “Who shall I say sent me (to Pharaoh)?” (Exodus 3:13. 8)
- “What can separate us from the love of God?” (Romans 8:35)
- “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen. 3:11)
- “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

Some of these questions are asked by God, by prophets, or by ordinary people.

Talking Point

- **Considering these thoughts from the Bible, share with the group:**

1. Which of these biblical questions touches you? Why?

People of faith are people who are asked questions and who ask them. What on earth am I here for? Who is God to me today? What difference does it make to have relationship with God?

If you love someone, you are curious about them. You want to know more about them, what they think, feel, who they are, what their plans are, their hopes and dreams, their fears and their values. To be in a relationship with anyone, is to participate in a long conversation. The conversation has interruptions, for sure, but it continues to ask and answer questions.

To love someone is to also appreciate that ultimately, the other is mysterious, and not completely knowable. We can know someone for a very long, time, very intimately, but we can never exhaust what there is to know about them. Every one has a core of “unknowability.” The same is true, perhaps even more so, with God. We can never know all there is to know about God, Jesus,

the Holy Spirit or our faith. We can simply be willing to continue to ask questions, learn and grow closer. God is the One who is Beyond us, Beside us and Within us.

Some of the questions we may have about God are, “Who are you, really?” What is God’s nature, and how do we know who God really is? The Bible says a lot of things about God, from a lot of different perspectives. From a Christian point of view, it really does boil down to a few, simple things. *God is love. God’s nature is love, and God’s purpose for us is to be in a loving relationship with God, our neighbor and our deepest selves.*

But, those answers lead to other questions that people have asked for a long time: What is love? Who is my neighbor? Isn’t loving myself selfish? How do I “love” God, whom I cannot see? What can I count on God for?

Talking Point

- **Share with the group:**
Suppose you were a contestant on The Millionaire! You can ask any question you wanted! And, GOD is your lifeline! Go, ahead....ask!!

I have an aunt who has always been deeply religious and faithful. She had five children, and loved being a mom. In fact, when her kids grew up, she started a day care center for toddlers in her home.

When her oldest son was in his early 20s, he was killed in a car accident. I remember seeing her a few months later. She was struggling very hard, because she said, “The one thing I always asked of God was to keep my children safe.” It took a long time for her to heal from that grief, the deep disappointment in God, and to face the tough, adult questions: “Why didn’t God answer my prayers in the way I had hoped?” “If I can’t count on God for keeping my children safe, what can I count on God for?” “What good are you, God?” Not only did she have grief over the loss of her son, but she had the additional pain of losing a less sophisticated view of God. Somehow, even with all she knew about the world, and the tragedies that happen every day, she had felt reasonably secure that her simple faith in God would keep *her* children safe. Like magic.

But faith is not magical. And tragedies happen to everyone, including people with enormous faith and trust in God. My aunt had to re-connect with God in a new way. She learned that she could not count on God to always keep her children safe. But she could count on God to help her through anything that life presented her, including profound loss. She needed God again when her husband died of cancer a few years later. She came to a deeper acceptance of the arbitrariness of life and death, and that our relationship with God does not protect us from pain, but can help us move through it. God is ultimately the Resource we can count on for strength, endurance, hope, and peace, in the midst of the storms.

And, yet, we do pray to God for “favours,” for help and intervention. Marjorie Suchocki has a

marvelous way of thinking about that in her essay on “Intercessory Prayer.” She believes that God can use our energy and collective prayers to actually accomplish things that could not be accomplished otherwise. That we can sometimes also be the answers to our own prayers. But, as we know there are no guarantees; there is no failsafe, magical system through which we can manipulate God.

So many people have their childhood, magical thinking about God (“Jesus loves you, but I’m His favorite!”) challenged, or even crushed, and never have it restored. Some of those people end up in MCC, looking for community; looking for, I believe, a more adult, grown up faith.

Talking Point

- **Share with the group: Share an experience when your energy through prayer has accomplished something that otherwise might not have happened. In what way did this impact your faith?**

Or

- **What do you think you can count on God for?**

SHARING FAITH/CLOSING

In a sentence or two share concerns and needs with each other.

From your "prayer circle" pray briefly for the one on your right, either silently or aloud. (When finished, say amen if praying silently).