

# The Ongoing Quest

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

September 2020 (30 August - 3 October)



This month we come to God with our questions.

Through the Bible and in the power of the Holy Spirit we are invited into a heavenly conversation with God and with one another spanning thousands of years. The Bible is a rich book full of answers but it's even more full of questions — to spur us on and shape us as disciples. In prayerful community, supporting one another and with the guidance of the Trinity, we continually learn new things about holiness and humanity.

In the beginning was the question.  
In the beginning was the quest.  
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.  
We became part of the quest as the question dwelt with us.  
And it continues to dwell in us and through us...

There are things we know about God and creation and love and humanity.  
And there's things we are still figuring out.  
Our search for God, for meaning, for understanding is an unfinished journey this side of eternity.

It's an ongoing quest.

*The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the adapt the monthly theme material (see [The Ongoing Quest Resource Pack](#)) for small group work. They are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. **These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.***

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### Part 1: Burning up

#### Read Exodus 3: 1-15

Like Moses toasting his toes in front of the burning bush, we sometimes find ourselves hopping from foot to foot, buying time by asking God's questions. 'Why this? Why that? Surely not me? Surely not now?'

What are the burning questions that you have for God? What are some of the things that bother you and puzzle you about God? (As a group you are not going to try and answer all these questions now — the questions are for God after all not one another — it's just a chance to share some of the things we puzzle over).

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#### Read Romans 12: 9-21

Do we leave room for God's wrath? God who is infinitely wiser and more compassionate than us. God is a God of love but can still know anger at injustice and cruelty and hypocrisy. As well as our hopes and dreams can we hand God our resentments, our bitterness, our grievances?

But how do we do so while also maintaining safe and caring societies that hold people to account for wrongdoing?

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#### Read Matthew 16: 21-28

'Get behind me, Satan!' is one of the harshest 'burns' in the Bible.

Why is Jesus so hard on Peter?

What do you think his tone of voice was when he said it?

Do you think Jesus ever says the same to his disciples today?

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### Part 2: I've got a few questions...

#### Read Psalm 149

A two edged sword? What to make of the bloodthirsty turn in the second half of verse 6? Rather than a literal call to arms there could be something more artistic going on: defiant poetry from an oppressed group who are fired up and ready to stand up for what they believe in getting swept up in it all. But how do we reconcile the violent imagery with our God of love?

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#### Read Romans 13: 8-14

What does the PPE of light look like? Taking inspiration from the armour of God riff in Ephesians 6:10-18, consider what the *Personal Protective Equipment* of light might look like.

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#### Read Matthew 18: 15-20

We're meant to work together... The message here is one of vertical partnership with heaven and horizontal partnership with one another.

Why then do we so often insist on going it alone and doing it our own way?

Why is the history of the church so full of conflict, schism and separation?

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### Part 3: Who are you?

#### Read Psalm 114

How on earth can we get our heads around how massive God is? Can we ever grasp the scale of God?

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#### Read Genesis 50: 15-21

*But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?*

Not all of us will have had Joseph's colourful backstory and have come to his elevated position of influence. But many of us do wield a certain measure of power in our lives over colleagues, clients, friends, the general public, the less privileged and those marginalised around the world.

Do we ever find ourselves playing God - abusing the power we have over others? Do we find ourselves putting ourselves - and not God - in the position of ultimate judge?

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#### Read Matthew 18: 21-22

Jesus' reply undercuts the premise of Peter's question. We are not to count, to keep score, to maintain a ledger of all our grievances until they pass a certain threshold. We are to go on forgiving.

Somehow we have to work out a way of living together — holding wrongdoers to account, maintaining a safe and secure society where the powerful don't lord it over everybody else — with a spirit of forgiveness that recognises the dignity of all.

How do we reconcile our calling to go on forgiving others with our responsibilities to challenge cruel and harmful behaviour?

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### Part 4: Bringing it all before God

#### Read Exodus 16: 1-30

In this sequence the sole reason to store surplus is to allow you to rest. A capitalist mindset would think it makes sense to save and bank the extra mana so that you have more for the future. You can imagine if Aaron was on the ball he could have set up 'Mana Incorporated' and built up a stockpile of sachets to sell on once they had made it out of the wilderness. Mana Inc would give employment, a sense of purpose and a basis to build for the future. Of course you would need incentives for the strongest gatherers to collect more and a safety net for those who would not pick enough. Having everyone stop for a day would be a waste of the resource and so a shift system could allow for 7-day collections. With all the investment in mana a start-up Quail Enterprises could think of a way of preserving vast quantities of fowl. It would have been sensible, sound, judicious... and totally against God's plans.

Why does God want this abundance to be turned into rest rather than profit?

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#### Read Matthew 20: 1-16

'Why are you standing here idle all day?' Reflections on this reading often focus on the grumbling of the early workers. This time around let's look at the above question put to the workless folk. When asked why they are idle they immediately fire back that nobody has asked them to do anything.

In our communities, in our churches, in our world — who are the jobless workers that no one is bringing in, involving — finding a place for? Who are we ignoring? Who are we not bothering to ask?

How can we bring it all before God if we're not all here?

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#### Read Hebrews 4: 14-16

Through Jesus, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit knows what it is like to be human.

Jesus knows the power of the Spirit and the creativity of the Father. It's fair to say the Trinity is a bit of a mindmelding concept (3 in 1, 1 in 3...) a three part person. Sometimes people compare the Trinity to a chord of three notes fitting together into one whole sound.

How does the Trinity make you feel? What questions do you have? Quite a few...? Theologians have been wrestling with the concept of the Trinity for thousands of years so you're in good company.

If you could ask one member of the Trinity one question what would it be?

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### Part 5: Answers, and more questions

#### Read Exodus 17: 1-7

Here we see the Israelites facing a common human predicament: wishing you could have your old troubles back instead of these new ones. Often in the midst of adversity we wish we could wind back the clock — maybe not even to the ‘good times’ but the ‘bad old days’ when at least it was a ‘bad’ we were familiar with instead of the overwhelming problems we face at the moment. Many of us in this time of pandemic have had to face challenges an order of magnitude worse than what has come before.

But for the Israelites in the wilderness, and for us today, there is no way back — only a way forward however unclear.

In this sequence we see honest prayer followed by direct action.

What are the honest prayers we have to bring to God and what are the direct actions we need to take in order to look forward, instead of back, and face the complex challenges facing our world today?

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#### Read Colossians 4: 2-6

Don't be bland.

When it comes to answering questions people have about our faith we can season our conversations with grace, and honesty, and humility. We don't have to have all the answers (and it's rather unlikely that we do...) We can be honest about our feelings, our doubts, and our own questions — and not try to make things sound simpler or neater than they are.

How do you feel when people ask you about your faith?

What do you find interesting and compelling about how others talk or write about their faith? What can you learn from them so as to be able to share your faith in an engaging and relatable way when people ask you about it?

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#### Read Matthew 21: 23-32

We are often told that if we want to know what God is like we should look to Jesus in the Gospels. How does Jesus often answer a question — with another question, or a story, or both! Sometimes God answers our questions in unexpected ways by encouraging us to follow a different path or to dig into a deeper story.

Have there been times in your life where God has surprised you? When things have gone in a totally different direction to what you were expecting and yet you can see God working in the change of circumstance?