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WELCOME TO *WHERE YOUR HEART IS: AN ILLUSTRATED DEVOTIONAL*

Our Illustrated Devotionals are meant to be colored in and doodled/drawn on. You will see opportunities to color, doodle, draw, and respond to prompts throughout the devotional. We invite you to allow the illustrations and spaces for creativity to draw you deeper into reflection.

Our theme's inspiration comes from Jesus' teaching about storing treasures in his Sermon on the Mount. This Lent, we invite you to explore the many treasures you have in your life. Some are physical treasures we can touch, hold, store, and give. Some treasures are invisible, yet still greatly matter and guide our lives. **By exploring Gospel passages about treasures and matters of the heart, we invite you to wonder more deeply about what kinds of treasure matter, why we store treasures, and the power these treasures have in our lives.**

We encourage you to explore how these ideas and themes influence how you view God, your faith, and the world. This Lenten devotional is written to be used individually or with a group, intergenerationally, or with youth groups or adult studies.

So grab a pen, some crayons or colored pencils, and start working through the devotional.

As you use these resources, we would love to hear what was helpful and meaningful, as well as any suggestions and comments you have for improvement. Your feedback helps us continue to create quality faith formation materials. You can reach us at info@illustratedministry.com or find us on the following social networks:

Facebook: fb.com/illustratedmin

Instagram: instagram.com/illustratedmin

Twitter: twitter.com/illustratedmin

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Our Facebook Group is a growing community of our customers and friends. If you're looking for ideas and suggestions for using this resource or any other product suggestions, request to join here:

fb.com/groups/illustratedmin

We also love to see photos and hear stories about how you are using our products. When you post photos or comments online, please use the hashtag [#illustratedmin](https://twitter.com/illustratedmin) or tag us in the photos so we can see them. That allows us to be part of the conversation and you to be part of our online community. Additionally, checking the hashtag on social media is a great way to see how other families and churches are creatively using our resources.

Peace be with you!

Illustrated Ministry



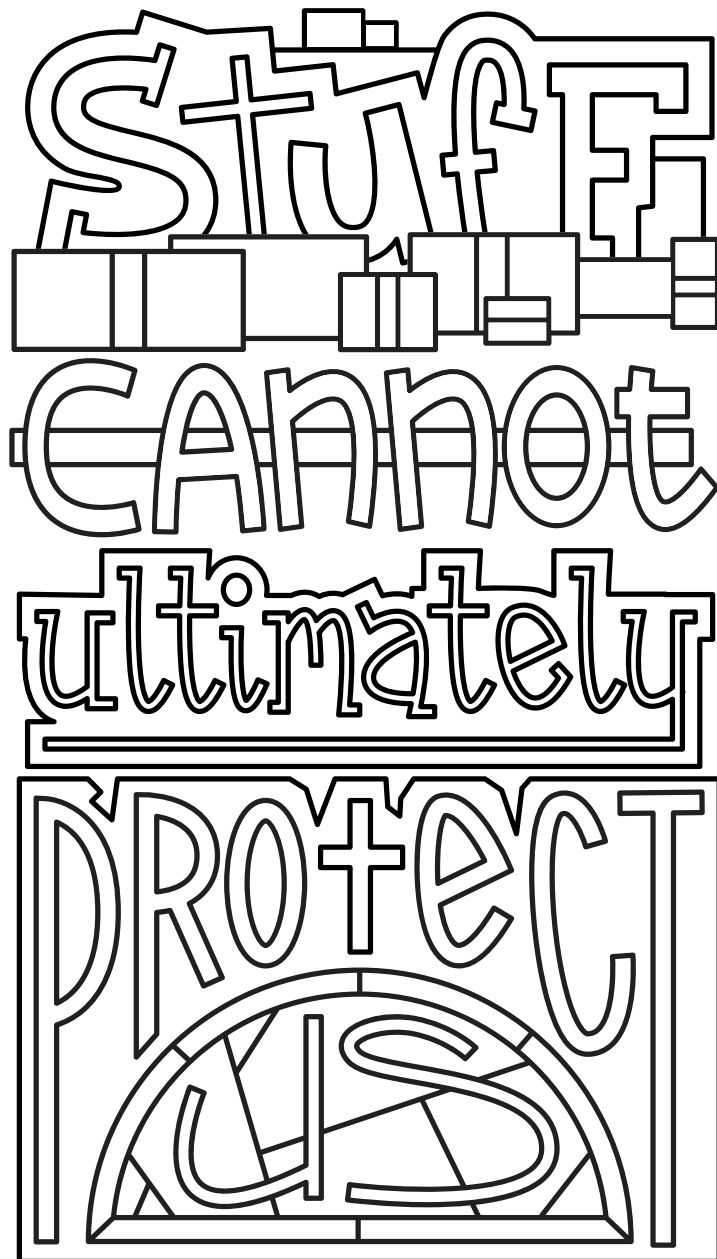
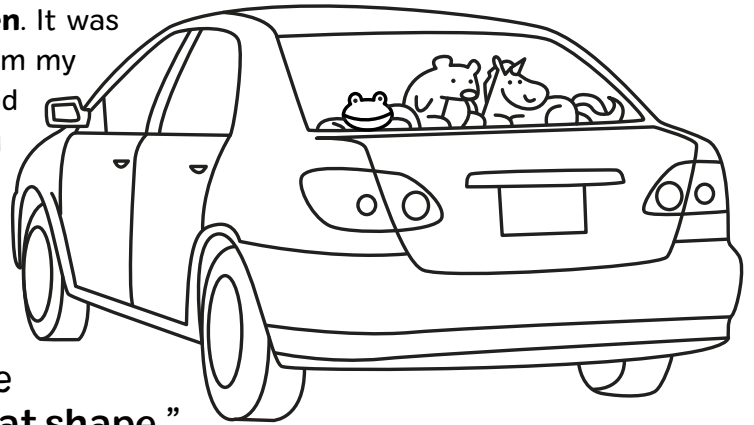
STORING UP TREASURES

MATTHEW 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

When I was 21 years old, **my car was stolen**. It was my first car, a silver Toyota I'd bought from my grandma. It took me to my college campus and back home again countless times, on a few Spring Break trips, to a summer internship in the Rocky Mountains, and to a stint with a community project in Mississippi.

When I got the call saying it had been found, I was warned. "Don't get too excited," the police officer told me. "It's not in great shape."



It was an old car with about a zillion miles on it, so it wasn't in great shape even before it was stolen. But I wasn't prepared for the damage that had been done to it in the week it was gone—mirrors broken off, cigarette burns in the seat cushions, trash everywhere.

What upset me most, though, was what was missing.

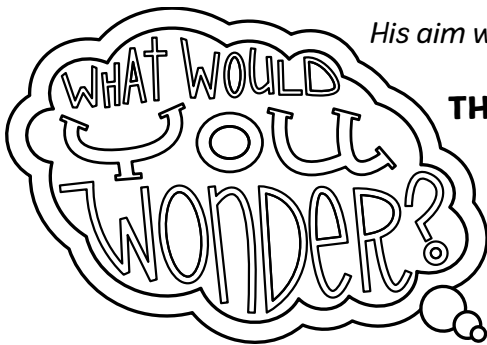
The things I kept in that car wouldn't have seemed valuable to anyone else, but they mattered to me. The glove compartment was stuffed with notes passed to me in the hallway by a high school friend that always cheered me up whenever I re-read them. Along the back windshield, I'd lined up stuffed animals: a frog from my college roommate, a bear from my parents, and a unicorn. I kept a book of mazes for when I was hauling kids around, but friends my age seemed to enjoy it, too. There were a lot of good memories attached to a lot of cheap things in that car, and whoever stole it also emptied it of all of that. I had the vehicle back, but the piece of my heart it contained was gone.

"Stuff cannot ultimately protect us, and we cannot ultimately protect it," writes New Testament professor Amy-Jill Levine.⁽¹⁾

The nod to moths, rust, and thieves is a reminder our stuff is vulnerable to both natural and human forces, both unintentional wasting away and purposeful destruction.

If our hearts are wrapped around our stuff,
if we find our treasure in what is easily damaged,
what becomes of our hearts
when the stuff is destroyed?

Parable scholars Bernard Brandon Scott and John Dominic Crossan suggest Jesus uses images like the ones in this teaching—moths, rust, and thieves—not to answer questions, but to *start conversations*. Meaning, if we read or hear this story and we turn to each other and say, “wait...what?” that’s precisely the reaction Jesus intended.



His aim wasn't to tell people what to do but to invite them to

THINK in new ways,

QUESTION how things are and why,

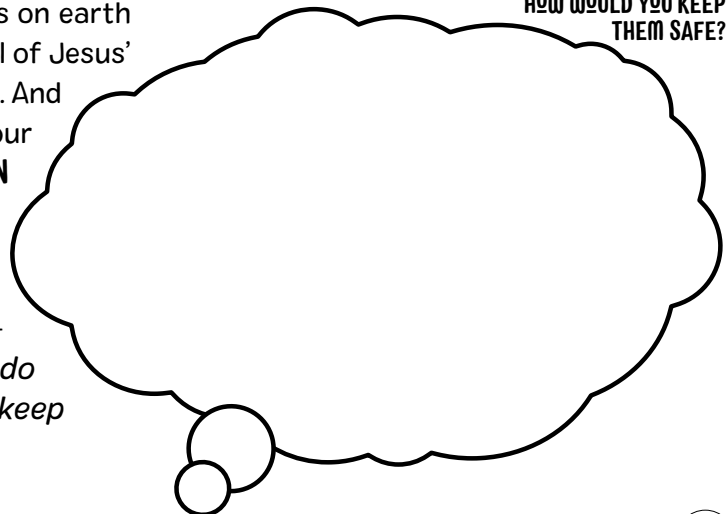
and really **WONDER** about how they might participate in making their world more like what God intended at creation.

IF YOU WERE IN THE CROWD HEARING THIS, WHAT WOULD YOU TURN AND SAY TO THE PERSON NEXT TO YOU? WHAT WOULD YOU WONDER?

Maybe the warning about storing up treasures on earth is pretty clear. That theme reappears in several of Jesus' teachings, even other stories in this devotional. And we get caught when we commit ourselves to our stuff. **We ACCUMULATE, we OBSESS, and we TURN AWAY from the needs of neighbors all around us while we stockpile resources for ourselves.**

But we **are** encouraged to store up treasures—in **heaven**. *So...what might those be? How do we collect them? What does it mean to keep them safe?*

**WHAT TYPES OF TREASURE MIGHT YOU STORE IN HEAVEN?
WRITE SOME OF THEM DOWN IN THIS SPACE.
HOW WOULD YOU KEEP THEM SAFE?**



When I think about this instruction from Jesus, to concentrate on the kind of treasures thieves can't break in and steal, *I know it's not really a reminder not to keep notes from old friends or favorite stuffed animals in my car.* Deep down, I can still recall those notes and smile, think about that stuffed frog and be flooded with memories of my roommate, and bring to mind the relationships those physical things were touchstones for.

All along it was what they pointed to, not the things themselves, that were really of value to me.

Jesus' teaching isn't just a warning from one way of living our lives; it's also a call toward another way. It's a realignment, a redirection of our hopes, our dreams, and our attention. *As we journey through Lent, as we ponder the treasures in our lives, maybe we will find where our hearts are.*



QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

What does your stuff make easy for you? What does it make hard?

Is there a physical, tangible thing you really love, whose loss you would mourn, if it were stolen or destroyed? Can you tell a story about what it is, and why it matters to you?

GOING DEEPER

Amy-Jill Levine states that stuff cannot “ultimately” protect us, but some stuff does offer us some protection. How can we honor that, without making it our treasure?

How do you understand the connection between your treasure and your heart?

What is something you hold in your heart that can never be stolen or destroyed?



SHARING OUR HEARTS

LUKE 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

What a gift it must be, as a parent or caregiver, to have a community that cares for your child—to be able to **trust everybody’s looking out for your kid**. She can go to the park by herself because she passes the houses of six people she knows along the way. She could stop in if she skins her knee, needs a drink of water, or even forgets the way.

What a gift to know if your kid talks back to someone, you’re going to hear about it because everybody wants to make sure he knows what it means to treat people with respect. And what a gift it must be as a kid—*even if it doesn’t always feel that way*—to know wherever you go, people are looking out for you, rooting you on, ready to step in and offer kindness or correction or support or a sandwich, whatever’s needed in the moment, because that’s what it means to be a community.

NOT EVERYONE IS LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE THIS AS PART OF THEIR WORLD.

But Mary, Joseph, and their children were. The parents set out on a journey with their community and trust Jesus is somewhere among the crowd. They trust the crowd enough to know he’ll be okay: he’ll be swept along in the movement, he’ll be guided back if he starts to wander, he’ll be fed at mealtimes, and he’ll connect with them again at the end of the day’s journey. **But he doesn’t.**

Jesus doesn’t connect with them at the end of the day. They ask around, and nobody’s seen him.

THEY START TO PANIC.

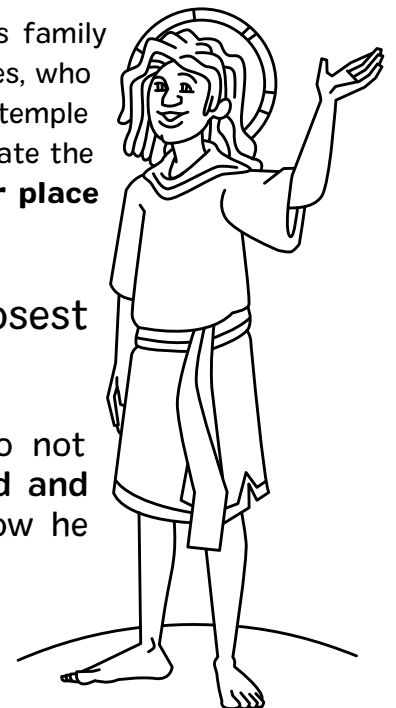
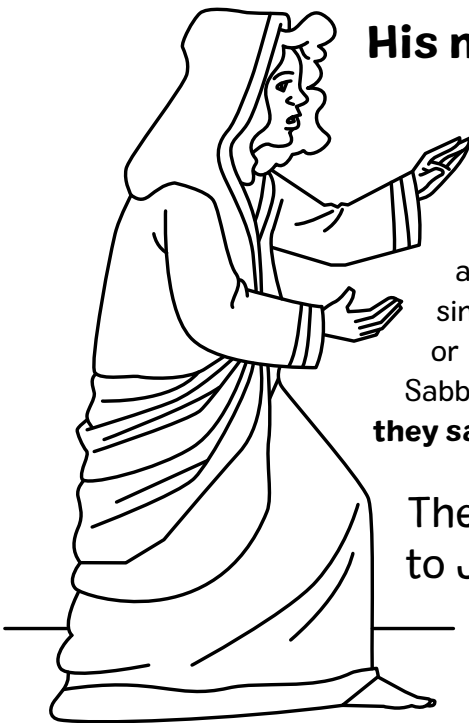
His mother, who from the very beginning has held him and treasured him in her heart, **now can’t reach out her hands to find him.**

His community—the people who know his family and his home, his traditions and his tendencies, who sing his favorite song with him on the way to the temple or sit around a table with his siblings to celebrate the Sabbath—**now can’t identify the last time or place they saw him.**

There are things even the people closest to Jesus don’t know about him.

First and most obviously: they do not know where he is right now. **Second and most interestingly:** they do not know he “must be in [his] Father’s house.”

JESUS SEEMS SURPRISED BY THAT.



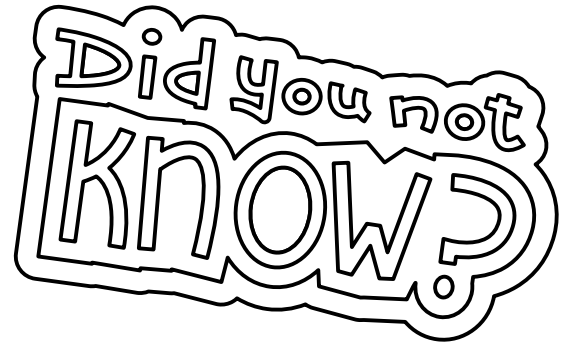
He knows where his heart is: there, at the temple, deep in conversation; there, at the feet of teachers, and teaching himself; there, surrounded by scrolls and scholars.

He assumes his parents know where his heart is.

Hadn't he been asking lots of questions?

Hadn't he been teaching them, too, and anybody in the neighborhood who would listen?

Hadn't he been rising early in the morning to pray?



How could they not have noticed?

My oldest kid loves Minecraft. Late into the night, long after they've shut off their screens, he and his brother talk strategy. He wants to tell me about what he's learning and show me what he's building. He wants me to get excited about it with him. **I try—sort of.**

He keeps asking me to learn the game. We struck a deal the other day. I would learn Minecraft if he would learn ancient Hebrew. I set it up that way because I thought there was no way he'd agree to those terms...but he did. *He'll spend the time learning something I love because he so wants me to join him in something he loves.*

There are some things we both love: reading, the ocean, and riding bikes.

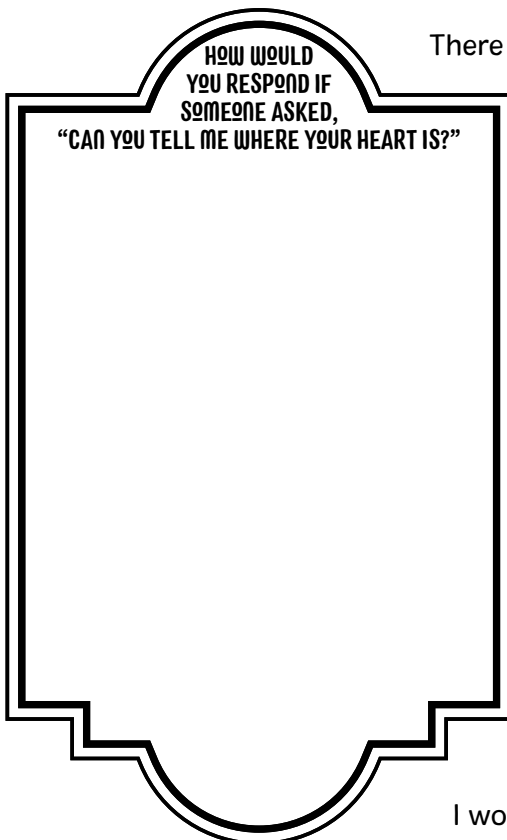
IT'S EASY TO SHARE OUR HEARTS IN THOSE MOMENTS.

But some of what we each treasure—like Minecraft and ancient Hebrew—are harder to share. Maybe I won't end up loving his game and wanting to spend my time building worlds there. Maybe he won't end up loving Hebrew and wanting to spend his time reading the Psalms with all of their original nuances. ***Even so, we will try to meet each other's hearts.***

I wonder if, when they eventually arrived home, Jesus took his parents aside and said,

“Let me tell you why I stayed behind. LET ME TELL YOU WHERE MY HEART IS.”

I wonder, then, *if their hearts swelled*, to make room for all the ways their boy was growing and changing, all he was *teaching them anew*.



QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

How is your community like the community of Jesus' family described here?

Do you think Jesus' staying behind was accidental (he just didn't notice his family leaving) or intentional (he went with them a little while, so he wouldn't be missed from the initial headcount, then broke from the group and snuck back to the temple to continue his conversations)?

What are some ways you look out for each other?

What difference do these possibilities make to how you understand the story?

Who understands your heart?

GOING DEEPER

How do you share your treasure with others? How is that sharing received?

What are some ways we can honor the passions of those we love, even if those passions are different than our own?



KNOWING THE GOOD

MATTHEW 19:16-26

Then someone came to him and said, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “I have kept all these; what do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

Nobody's perfect. Isn't that what we hear when we mess up? When we're too hard on ourselves for failing to live up to our own unreasonable expectations?

NOBODY'S PERFECT.

It's what people who care about us say *to comfort us, to let us know there is grace and they love us* regardless of what we achieve or don't.

But...nobody's good? That seems like an overstatement.

Surely you know people—**maybe you yourself**—who are kind to strangers, animals, and *even siblings*.

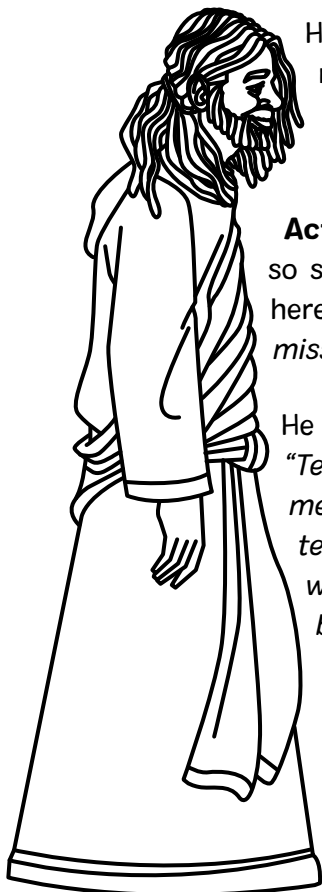
People who *open their eyes and their hearts and their homes* to those in need.

People who *laugh with friends* who are happy and *cry with friends* who are sad.

People who *love God, the world, and everything in it* with great energy, compassion, and joy.

ALL OF THAT IS GOOD.

BUT JESUS SAYS, "THERE IS ONLY ONE WHO IS GOOD."



He redirects the young man's question—*"what good deed must I do?"*—to a recognition of God's goodness. And it surprises the man. He really believes he's doing *lots of good*. I'd believe it, too. He knows all the rules of his tradition and followed them his whole life. Doesn't that count for something?

Actually...that's his question. It seems like it should, but he's not so sure. He knows the written-down rules, but he seems suspicious here. It's like he's asking, *"Is there another scroll somewhere? A page I'm missing? Are there additional rules nobody told me about?"*

He has this hunch there's something else. Something more. He says, *"Tell me why I'm following all the rules, and I'm not content. Explain to me how I can be successful and so unsettled. If you're so wise, Jesus, tell me how it is I can do what God asks of me, and still not be sure what my life is for, or trust that at the end, any of this will have been worth it."*

And Jesus says, "Ah. So, you're ready for more than just the rules."

JESUS INVITES THE MAN TO A NEW WAY.



THE QUESTION, JESUS TELLS HIM, ISN'T ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE. THE QUESTION IS ABOUT ENTERING INTO LIFE, RIGHT HERE AND NOW.

The commandments—the rules to which Jesus directs the man—are about this life. The commandments are about how we live with elders and children and neighbors, how we respect our stuff and other people's, **how we keep God at the very center.**

And he tells the man, *“If you wish to be perfect, here's what you do: leave it all.”*

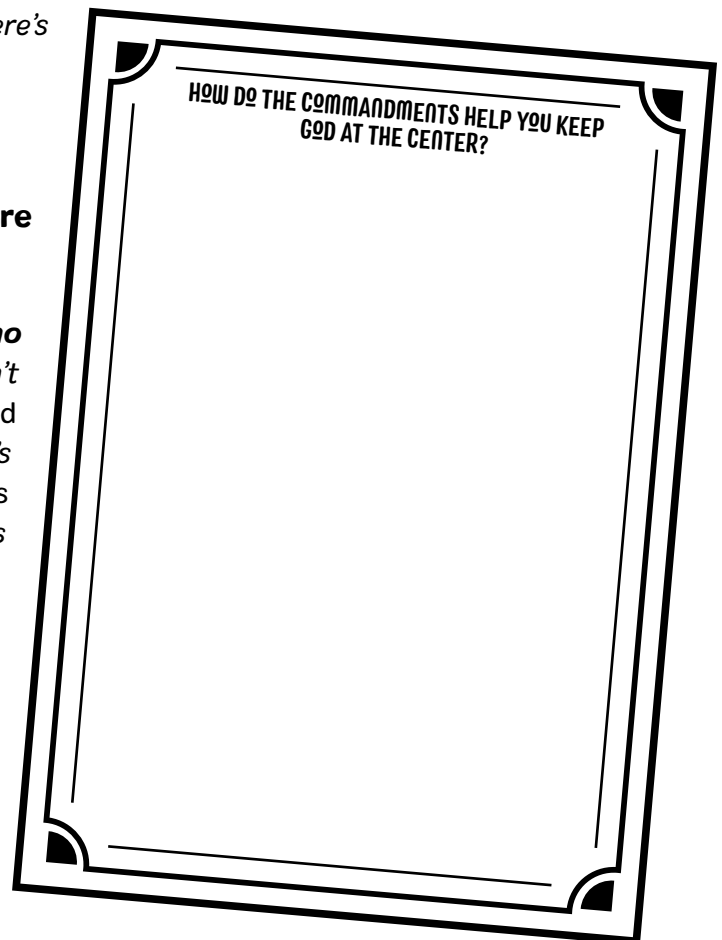
But wait. Does the man want to be perfect?

Or is Jesus pointing the way towards more than he's asking for?

*The man is in a real bind now because there's no way to follow the rules and leave it all. He can't honor his father and mother and leave them to fend for themselves. He can't **not** covet his neighbor's bed or bread if he gives up those comforts in his own life. He can't abandon his society's structures and know he'll still enjoy the same security those structures have provided him all along.*

I READ THIS STORY, AND I WONDER: WHAT MADE THE YOUNG MAN WALK AWAY?

Was it the idea of selling his possessions—that he just couldn't bear to part with them? Was it the idea of giving the profits to the poor—not only would he not have his stuff, but he also wouldn't earn anything or make a return on his investment?



Could it be he left to consider, maybe for the first time, where his heart was?

Maybe then he walks, for the last time, to the edge of his property.

Maybe he looks with gratitude and sadness over his vast landscape,
all he's accumulated over the years.

Maybe he thinks about the rules he's followed all along, running through the list in his mind,
and he realizes they've helped to order his life in a particular way.

WHAT JESUS IS INVITING HIM TO IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF ORDERING: A LIFE THAT RESPONDS *NOT TO SCRIPT BUT TO SPIRIT*, A LIFE THAT RESPECTS THE RULES BUT FOLLOWS WHERE THE TRUE TREASURE—THE PURSUIT OF THE ONE GOOD GOD—LEADS.

Maybe the man closes his eyes,

says a brief prayer of thanks,

and *turns toward this new way*.

We don't know.

But we know it's not impossible.



QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

What are the rules you live by? Where and how did you learn them?

If you could invent one rule for everyone to live by, what would it be?

GOING DEEPER

Share a story of a time when the rules haven't been enough to figure out your situation or tell you what to do next.

Have you ever had to choose between two "goods"? How did you decide?

What do you think the man does the day after this conversation with Jesus?



CONSIDER THE LILIES

LUKE 12:13-34

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the

ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Friends of mine own a small vineyard in the hills. You can see the sunrise from there. The glow it casts on the surrounding landscape, the way it makes the dew sparkle on the grapevines, the view of Mt. Hood, snow-capped all year long, is magical. *In the evenings, a stillness descends, creating a deep peace.* It feels worlds away, even though it's just five minutes outside of town.

A while ago, I needed a place to host a small event and I asked my friends if we could use their vineyard. **“Of course!”** they said. They didn't even pause to think about it.

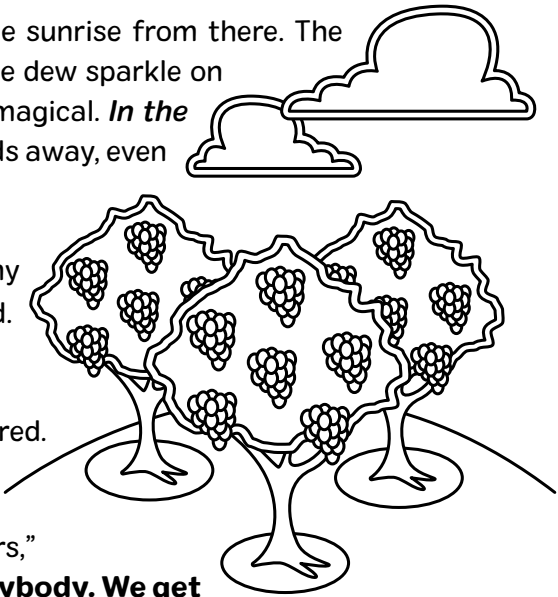
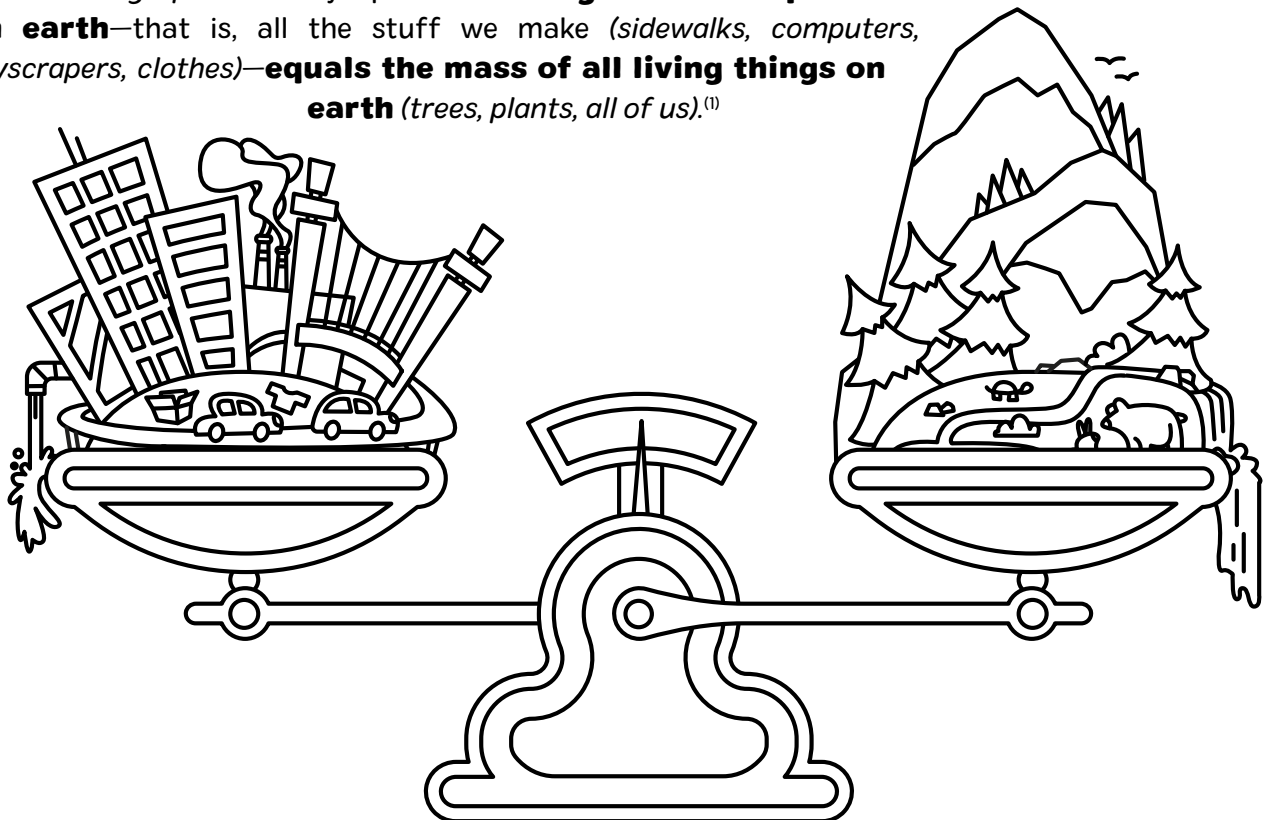
I was thrilled and surprised at how immediately they answered. “Are you...sure?” I asked. “What would be the fee?”

They shook their heads and smiled. “If it's open on our calendar, it's yours,” she said. And he said, **“When we got this place, we got it for everybody. We get to live here, but the land, the view, we got it to share. We want everyone who comes here to feel like it's theirs, too, because it really belongs to none of us.”**

I wonder what motivates some people, like these vineyard owners, to hold their belongings so loosely, and others, like the farmer in the story Jesus tells, to cling so tightly.

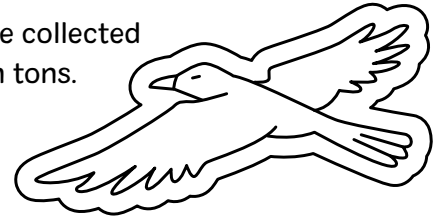
I WONDER IF IT HAS TO DO WITH WHERE THEIR TREASURE, THEIR HEARTS, ARE.

National Geographic recently reported **the weight of human production on earth**—that is, all the stuff we make (*sidewalks, computers, skyscrapers, clothes*)—**equals the mass of all living things on earth** (*trees, plants, all of us*).⁽¹⁾



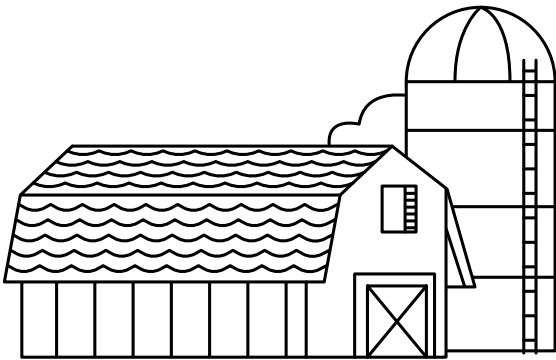
That is, our **junk** (and, okay, our art) weighs as much as **creation**. If we collected and weighed all the animals on the planet, they'd total about four billion tons.

THAT'S HALF OF THE WEIGHT OF THE PLASTIC WE'VE PRODUCED.



Our stuff weighs as much as the natural world, and nature is abundant. That's what we hear in this story that Jesus tells. *"The land of a rich man produced abundantly."* The man doesn't set out to grow for himself years' worth of grain. But that's what the land yields. He's surprised by it, and needs to figure out how to respond to it.

He builds **BIGGER** barns.



Have you ever seen a barn? They're pretty big already.

I imagine the man standing in front of his newly-erected storage facilities, stretching higher and wider than the ones before, and hauling all his crop inside to lock it up tightly. Chances are, when he steps back from it, all he can see is...barns. ***That's what happens when you're next to something so big: it blocks your vision.***

He likely couldn't see his fields in front of him, or the hills across the way, or his neighbor's land. Just his giant new barns.

And if that's all he can see, then the lilies growing across the way, the ravens perched in a nearby tree, aren't in his line of sight at all.

SURROUNDED BY HIS STUFF, CROWDED BY HIS NEED TO PROTECT IT, HE CAN'T SEE ALL GOD CARES FOR, ALL GOD CLOTHES AND FEEDS AND MAKES BEAUTIFUL.



A new restaurant is opening nearby. Last week they trained the workers. That meant they were making **a whole lot of food** and didn't have any customers. They contacted the local homeless shelter to ask if they could bring the food by.

The shelter director said yes, please, thank you.

When they brought the food, the shelter director realized there was more than the people staying at her facility could eat. She called a few other churches in town where people in need sometimes hang out. "Could you all use some burritos?" she asked. "I have way too many here."

Those churches said yes, please, thank you.

The restaurant had options. The employees could've eaten the food. They could've frozen it for a day when they needed a quick supply. They could've tossed it in the trash so they didn't create a reputation of giving away free food. After all, they'll soon want people to pay for those burritos.

They did none of that.

THEY HAD AN ABUNDANCE, AND THEY GAVE IT AWAY.

And they gave it to people who will likely never become customers, people who beg for change on street corners and cannot repay the kindness shown to them because they're working hard to just survive.

But maybe that didn't matter.

Maybe the restaurant owners are storing up treasure elsewhere.

QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

What else could the man have done with the abundance he had? Besides building bigger barns, what might some of his other options have been?

What's a treasure you want to protect? Why?

GOING DEEPER

Which emotions or experiences might influence the ways people respond to abundance?

Have you ever been so focused on what's right in front of you that it's been hard to see the reality a little farther away? What happened then?

The scripture tells us, "life is more than food, and the body more than clothing." On your own or with others, make a list of that "more." What else is life besides food? What else is the body besides clothing?



BECOMING SOMEONE NEW

MATTHEW 13:45-46

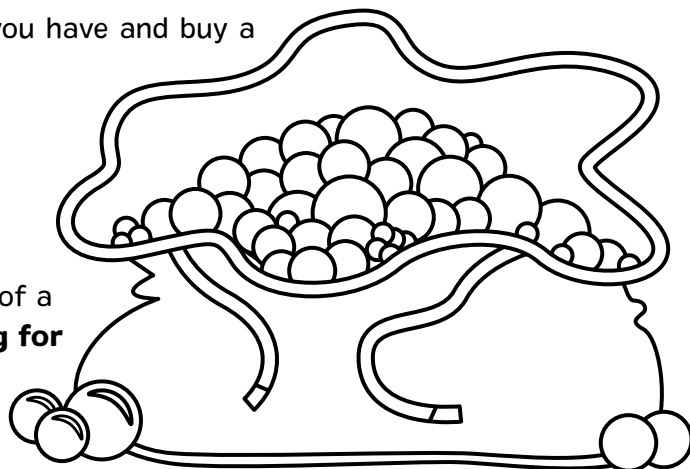
“**A**gain, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Maybe this is obvious, but if you sell everything you have and buy a pearl...**all you've got is a pearl.**

And what's a pearl worth?

EVERYTHING?

The character in the parable didn't set out in search of a pearl of great value. **He began his quest searching for lots of pearls.** But he found this one—**JUST ONE**—and gave everything he had for it.

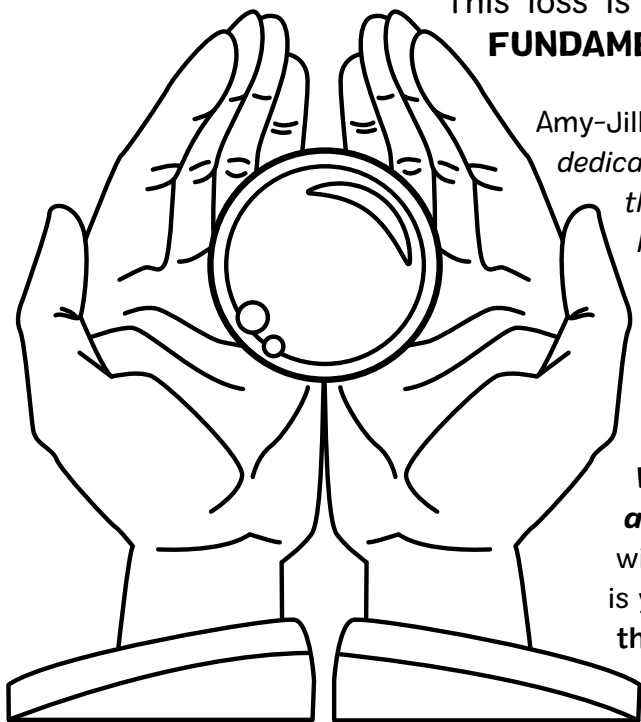


Before we say, "Well, sure, he found the kingdom of God!

Who wouldn't give everything for that? You gain everything in return!" we need to make sure we're reading closely what Jesus actually said, not what we think might've made sense for him to say.

The kingdom of heaven **isn't** like a pearl, even a pearl of great value. **The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who went in search of fine pearls...And when he finds his treasure—which, again, is not what he set out after—he sold everything to gain it.**

This loss is not a temporary change in status. **IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT OF BEING.**



Amy-Jill Levine writes, "Whether what he does is foolhardy or dedicated, **he has gained a pearl of enormous value.** In the gaining, he has not only fulfilled a desire he did not know he had; he has also changed his identity. He had been looking for fine pearls, but he buys only one. By finding that pearl of ultimate worth, the merchant stops being a merchant. **Thus he redefines himself, and we must see him anew as well.**"⁽¹⁾

When you sell everything you have, you can't do any more selling. And what do you become—just you, with your one, exquisite, forged-by-the-sea jewel? What is your life now, having rid yourself of all else? We know the person who was seeking fine pearls is no longer a merchant. **We don't yet know who they are on the other side of that.**

Are these the marks of the kingdom? *Mystery, Risk, Change, Freedom*? Is that what the seeking merchant experienced, or are those elements what we put in the story after it's over?

My mom was a nurse for her entire career. She spent thirty years in the emergency room. Once in a while, her twelve-hour shift was slow, but often it was frenzied and dramatic. *She and her colleagues did everything they could to save the lives of every patient they saw.* They had to think, act, and move quickly. It was an exhausting pace, but it was necessary.

After three decades of that work, my mom transitioned to working as a hospice nurse. She moved from the flashing lights and beeping monitors of hospital wings to more intimate scenes and sounds of dying people's homes. *She sat in their living rooms with their families. They made her tea, told her stories, and shared their wishes for their loved ones.* Everything slowed down. She never tried to save the lives of the people she visited. She accompanied them towards a peaceful death.

All of it was nursing, but with the exception of administering medications and paying attention to details, the two kinds of work were inherently different. She had to unlearn much of her ER training and ignore so many of the crisis instincts she'd honed over the years, to be a good hospice nurse. *It was all good and important work, but my mom learned a whole new way of being through that transition.*

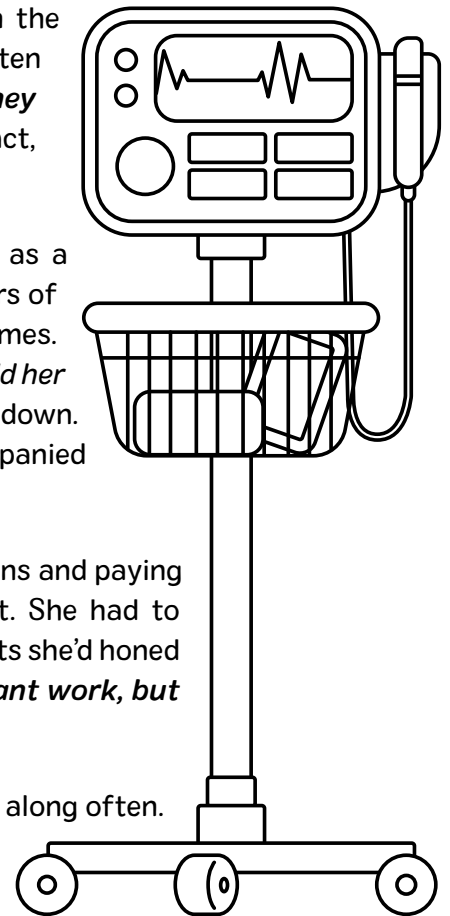
These moments, where we fundamentally shift who we are, don't come along often. But they are worth paying attention to. Sometimes, some of who we have been carries over into our new lives. **Sometimes, even when everything else shifts, our heart remains in the same place.**

In Jesus' story, we know the merchant gave up everything *he had*. What about everything *he was*? He's not a merchant anymore. But does anything else about him remain the same? His notion of **treasure**, maybe?

What about for you? Could you name something you'd give up everything for or in pursuit of? Would your answer to that question have been the same two years ago? Five? Ten? Twenty years ago? **HOW HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF "A PEARL OF GREAT VALUE" SHIFTED OVER TIME?**

Remember, it's alright if you don't have answers to these questions. The main character in Jesus' tiny parable here didn't really know what he was after until he found it.

THE KINGDOM ISN'T IN THE FINDING, AFTER ALL, BUT IN THE SEARCHING AND THE NEW BECOMING.



QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

If he were sitting with you now, what question would you ask the (man who once was a) merchant?

Can you imagine something you'd give up everything for?

GOING DEEPER

What's a big risk you've taken? What motivated you to take it?

Do you know anyone whose life has undergone a dramatic change, such that their identity was fundamentally different on the other side of that change? What have you learned from knowing them?

Can you tell a story of a search that's been meaningful to you?



SHIFTING OUR GAZE

MARK 9:30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

The disciples are embarrassed. Jesus caught them. **They know they're guilty, but they're not quite ready to admit it.** They think maybe if they don't answer his question, he'll forget he asked it. That's how that works, right?

He'd been talking about how their adventure together would end. It's an ugly end, but maybe, ultimately, a hopeful one. They don't totally get it yet, which is fine, but they're not trying to get it. **As soon as Jesus is done talking, they start whispering amongst themselves about who's the best, who's his favorite, who's got the highest score so far.** They know they're in the wrong here. *That's why they shut up.*

And maybe Jesus wishes they were more focused. Maybe he wishes they understood this critical moment they were facing, how they would need to step up, how much would depend on them when he was gone.

Or maybe he just wishes for a friend.

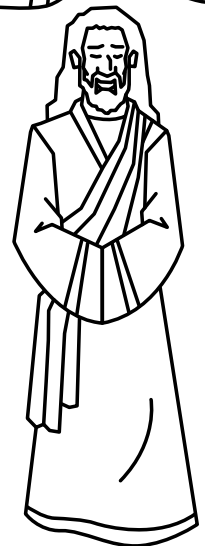
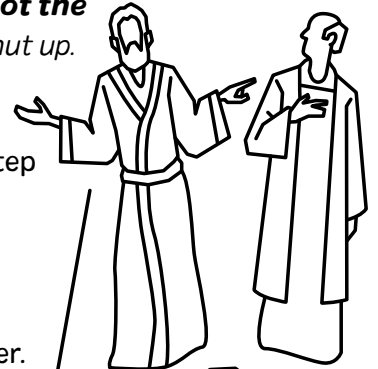
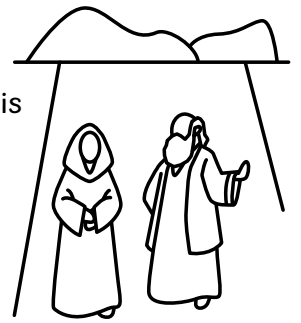
Maybe he wishes for someone, any one of them, to put a hand on his shoulder. To pull him close. To admit, "I don't understand what it's like to be you, but I care about you, and I'm sorry."

I don't want to be too hard on the disciples. They often don't understand what's going on, and lots of preachers and teachers are hard on them for that. But Ched Myers suggests their fallibility is actually what makes the disciples such good characters.⁽¹⁾

If they understood everything Jesus was saying, if they fully embraced the mystery of the kingdom and the power of God at work through them...well, sure, that'd be great. **But then those of us left to decipher these stories thousands of years later might feel like we have no place to enter, no sympathetic friend in the cast of characters when we can't figure it all out ourselves.**

As they are, the disciples are **eager** and **selfish**, **committed** and **confused**, **devoted** and **distracted**—just like the rest of us. **And we see them learn, grow, and change as the story evolves.** It's not all forward movement either. They seem to grasp a truth in one scene and forget it in the next, **just like the rest of us.**

The complication here is the disciples understand partially. They know a lot is at stake here. They know it is a big deal to have given up their old lives and taken up with Jesus. **They know he's bringing something new to the world, and they know they want to be part of it. But they don't yet understand how fundamentally different this new thing will be.** They're imagining the hierarchies that govern the world they currently live in will continue into what's coming, but in that newness, they imagine they'll be the ones on top.





And even though they don't tell Jesus this is what they've been arguing about, he knows. His response back to them proves he's heard more than they think he has. **And he challenges where their hearts are.**

To be recognized, rewarded, and honored for who they are and what they've given up to follow him—they think this would be the best possible new world.

And then he tugs at the **HAND OF A CHILD**, pulls the child to the middle of their conversation circle, and tells the disciples, **"LOOK HERE."** **He wraps the child in a hug and says to them, "This is the center of the new world."**

They then have to stop squabbling with each other. They have to stop imagining what it's like to be on top. **To see Jesus and the child he embraces, they have to look down.**

And looking down, *they see their teacher, seated.*

They see a child, cradled.

They see their dusty sandals, worn from the journey.

Maybe they see birds pecking at the ground.

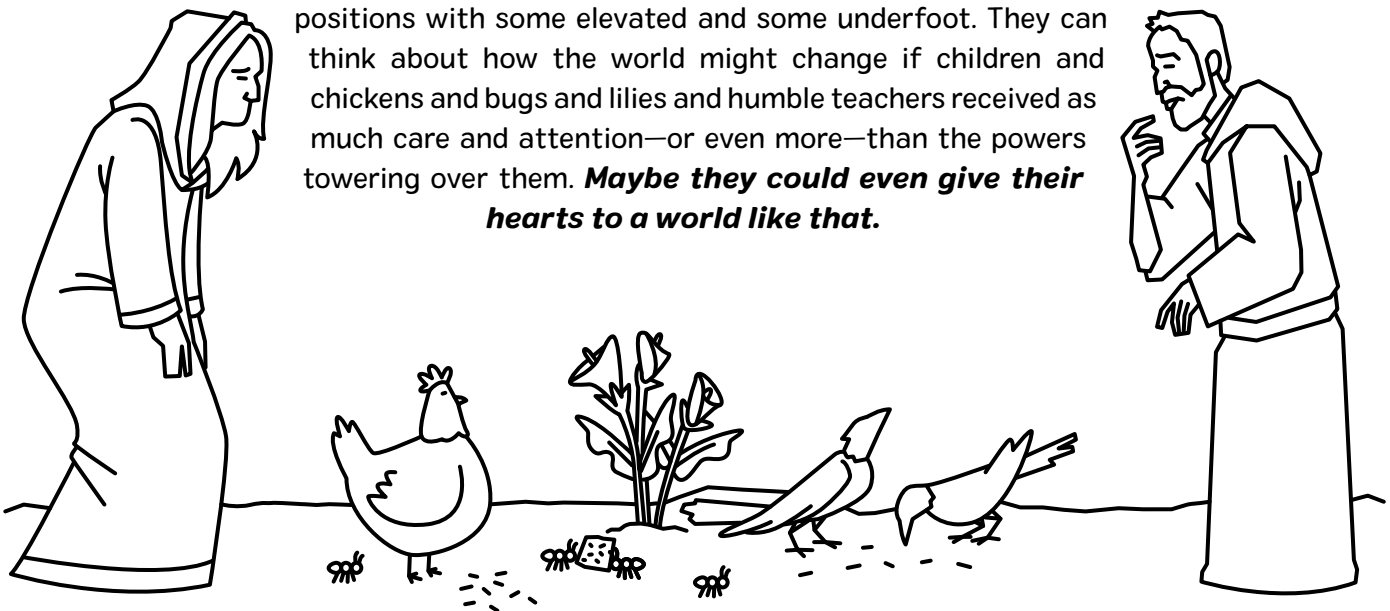
Maybe ants carrying crumbs twice the size of their bodies.

Maybe wildflowers popping up through cracked dirt.

THEY SEE VULNERABILITY, AND THEY SEE THE GROUND HOLDING ALL OF IT.

And looking down, *they can begin to imagine a new way.*

Not the same old hierarchies, with different people playing the positions with some elevated and some underfoot. They can think about how the world might change if children and chickens and bugs and lilies and humble teachers received as much care and attention—or even more—than the powers towering over them. **Maybe they could even give their hearts to a world like that.**



QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

What do you see when you look down? What about when you look up?

What kinds of things do you argue about?

GOING DEEPER

Have you ever not understood what a friend was going through? Or has a friend ever not understood you? What's that like?

Describe the world you give your heart to.

Can you draw connections between what the disciples are fighting about and what they treasure?



SHARING OUR TREASURES

MATTHEW 27:62-28:10

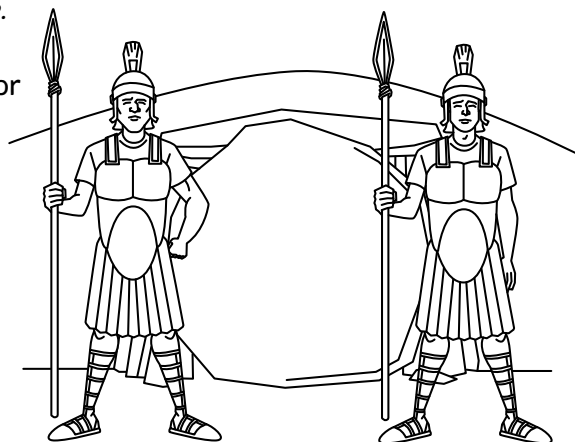
The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Even after they've killed Jesus—made what we might've thought would be their final claim—the authorities are still unwilling to loosen their grip on him. They've finally got a hold of their treasure and won't let it go. *As long as they can keep his body in their grasp, they reason, they can also hold on to their power.* They're fearful their grip on all of this—his body, his followers, and their place in the order of things—is not guaranteed. *They share conspiracy theories and make plans to thwart any possible attempt to undermine the finality of their violence.*

Because still, even with this gruesome treasure in hand, or in the tomb, even after they've given their hearts to this cruelty, **their status is not secure.** Like the man who tears down his barns to build bigger ones when his crops yield abundantly, their nervousness about their well-being causes them to act in ways that don't make sense. The trick these kinds of treasures play on us is devastating. Whatever we have, *it's never secure*; however much we have, *it's never enough.*



What these guards don't realize is—as Jesus told the disciples—**life is more than food; the body, more than clothing.** Life is even more than breathing, more than surviving. **Life is spirit, and story, and memory.** And the guards can't contain those things. *And the authorities can't stop their spread.*

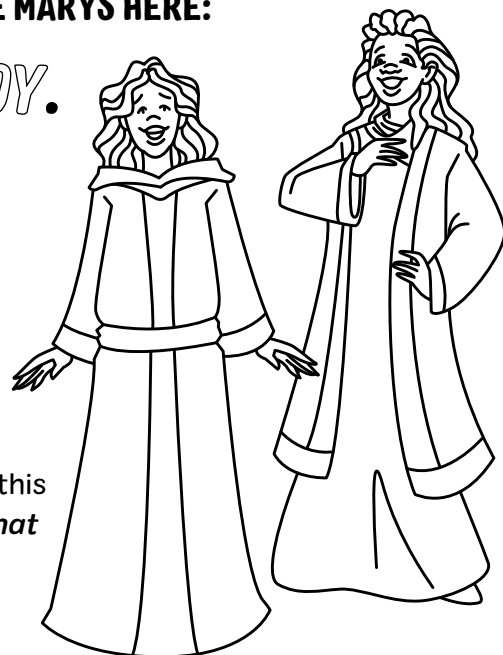
They invest their energy trying to secure a tomb that, in the end, can't hold Jesus: not his body, not his spirit, not his story, not his memory. *Their work surrounds the apparatus of death; **HIS WORK IS LIFE.***

MAYBE THE ONLY HONEST RESPONSE TO THIS WILDNESS—THIS SURPRISE TWIST THAT DEATH CANNOT CONTAIN LIFE NOR END IT—IS PRECISELY WHAT WE SEE FROM THE MARYS HERE:

TREMBLING FEAR AND ECSTATIC JOY.

HE HAS BEEN
RAISED

They must have a million questions, but in this moment, hearing this news from the angel, they can't yet ask. *Emotions rise up in them that can't yet be translated into words.*



? When he's afraid, my ten-year-old has a million questions. I was well-prepared for the persistent "whys" of the younger years, but no one warned me about the endless series of "what-ifs" from kids in the early double digits. Walking to school: **"What if we don't make it on time?"** On a balcony: **"What if this railing comes loose?"** At the ocean: **"What if there's a jellyfish in the water? What if I step on it? What if I slip and the waves carry me deep? What if there's a shark? What if my band-aid comes off and I start bleeding, and the shark can smell my blood? What if I swim away but don't make it out of the water in time? What if I make it out of the water, but it's one of those sharks that has evolved to walk on land, and it follows me onto the beach?"** These questions can go on and on until the only possible answer for me to give to whatever outrageous scenario my kid's dreaming up is to say, **"Well, then we'd die."** **?**

To my surprise, he doesn't freak out when I give that answer. He just stops asking questions. **Because he assumes, like maybe we all do, death is the end.** Nothing more to say, nothing more to fear, nothing more to wonder about.

The report of the angel here, **the good news of Easter**, is the truth that **THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING MORE TO WONDER ABOUT.**

Maybe that's the root of the Marys' joy. They had given their hearts to the kingdom Jesus proclaimed. They had seen it beginning to take root all around them, wherever people were fed, healed, forgiven, or set free. And maybe they'd been so caught up in it that they'd forgotten to ask all of their questions: "What if someone turns against us? What if people feel threatened by this work? What if you get in trouble? What if someone tries to steal this treasure?"



And then it all happened that way.

But here the angel comes, reminding them of what Jesus taught all along: **there are ways of investing your heart, your life, where moths and rust cannot consume your treasure, and thieves cannot break in and steal it.**

The angel comes and invites them to **wonder** again, to **meet** Jesus on the road, to **consider** how his spirit, story, and memory live on, and to **imagine** how to share these treasures.

Imagine their joy at discovering *not even the thief that is death* can take their **treasure** from them.

QUESTIONS to DISCUSS

Do you ever have emotions that you can't put into words? What do you do with them?

Have you ever been in charge of something very consequential...and lost it? Can you tell a story about that?

GOING DEEPER

Have you had the experience the Marys do here, of feeling fear and joy at the same time? What was the occasion? What was the combination of those reactions like for you?

What does the Easter story invite you to wonder about? What questions does it raise in you?

In what ways does Jesus' kingdom make itself known in your world?

ENDNOTES

Week One

- (1) Amy-Jill Levine, *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 97.

Week Four

- (1) Stone, Maddie. "Human-made Materials Now Equal Weight of All Life on Earth." National Geographic. December 09, 2020. Accessed January 08, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2020/12/human-made-materials-now-equal-weight-of-all-life-on-earth/>.

Week Five

- (1) Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2015), 152.

Week Six

- (1) Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 239 .



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