

## 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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So how many people have ever been in a funk? Anybody ever been in a funk? Anybody ever felt overwhelmed by the amount of things you needed to get done? And how many people ever felt distracted and lost your focus on your priorities? Anybody have that experience?

You know, our culture kind of almost fosters a fast pace of constantly being busy. We're feeling like we're always behind, trying to catch up in doing everything on our ever-expanding "to do" list: deadlines at work, family responsibilities, relationship issues, you know, money problems, or the pattern of overcommitting to the point that we feel like we never have enough time to get everything done.

Socrates, the Greek philosopher, said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." And it sounds a little bit harsh. But what he is saying is that, to live our best life, it requires some self-examination; to look at how we're living it. Life is such a precious, incredible, valuable gift that it behooves us to pause every now and then and look at how we're living our lives.

The Socratic method of learning -- one of the oldest and still considered the most powerful technique for training to foster critical thinking -- is really based on the whole premise of giving students questions instead of answers ... because it is through giving them questions that understanding, self-awareness and wisdom comes.

Recently, I listened to a podcast by Mel Robbins. Remember we did her book, "Let Them"? And she said that when life is so crazy -- when we feel a little bit lost, a little bit overwhelmed, a little out of balance -- the best thing we could do is stop and hit the pause button and ask ourselves a few questions.

It's like, "*What? You feel overwhelmed? Asking questions is the answer?*" And that would be correct. Because questions are the catalyst for new knowledge, for self-discovery and deeper insights. Because life really can distract us. It can almost hijack our attention and energy. And questions have a way of bringing us back to a level of awareness and a level of understanding. It helps us become a bit clearer and more grounded in what we are doing and who we are.

So, this morning, we're going to look at five important, powerful questions we can ask ourselves to help renew us and renew our focus when we are stuck.

And so, the first question is: **HOW ARE YOU REALLY DOING RIGHT NOW?** And before you think of your answer, just let's pass by the usual, "*I'm good, I'm great, I'm fabulous; I'm just getting better and better*" ... although that's a good affirmation to use. And let's slow it down a bit.

Everyone take a deep breath and ask it to yourself slowly: How am I really doing right now? And maybe how are you really doing is that you're really tired. Maybe you're overwhelmed. Maybe you're excited. Maybe you're content. Maybe you're hurting. Maybe you're anxious. Maybe you're grieving. Maybe you're on top of the world. Maybe you're having a great hair day. Maybe you're feeling restless. Maybe you're feeling unsettled.

Whatever it is that you're feeling, are you willing and able to acknowledge how you're doing right now to yourself? Without judging it, without hating it, without pretending to be otherwise, or trying to fix it, can you just accept and be okay with where you are at right at this moment?

So what are you feeling? What are you experiencing in this moment, at this time in your life? And the good and important thing to remember is that there's no wrong answer. It's just about telling yourself the truth. It's just about being honest and allowing yourself to be aware of where you really are.

And the fact is: we're all going through a lot. Life is not easy. The comedian Tom Papa says, *"It's hard being human if you even just look at how much work it takes to take care ourselves. All the brushing, all the washing, the wiping, the eating, the dressing, the undressing, the planning, the canceling. There's a lot of work involved just to be a human being."* So, it's not surprising that we get a bit overwhelmed from time to time.

But it's important for us to be honest with ourselves in how we're doing in those moments. Because when we are not honest, we are disconnected and not in touch with what's really going on with us ... not even in touch with what we're actually even feeling. And when we're not connected and we're not in touch, we're on autopilot being acting stressed and maxed out all the time.

You know, Dr. Lisa Damour, a clinical psychologist, said that everyone has a tough life and everyone is being overwhelmed from time to time, whether you're a teenager, an adult, a parent, or if you're single. She writes, *"Adolescents, just like adults, find relief by simply articulating their worries and concerns."* Psychologists say that our problems are better when they are on the outside than when they're on the inside. I would bet most of our problems are bigger in our heads than in our reality.

I don't know about you, but that is absolutely true for me. I journal – and only journal when I feel a little overwhelmed or I'm upset or a little irrational about something. And what I write down is far less scary, dramatic or traumatic than what goes on right in my own head. There is something powerful -- there's something liberating and relieving -- of just being honest about what's really going on.

You know, we carry a lot of stuff. We have a lot of stuff going on. And, again, just stating it is amazing how it can bring some release. Just acknowledging and accepting that, *"This is just where I am right now."*

And so: how are you doing right now? Are you struggling? Are you at peace? Are you feeling happy? Are you feeling sad? Are you feeling optimistic? Are you feeling lonely? Are you feeling grateful? You know, just admitting it actually gives us a level of space from it. And it helps us to not be stuck in it. And even if things can't be changed, just admitting it and acknowledging it helps us with coping; it helps us with processing; and utilizing that feeling in that moment to reconnect with ourselves.

You know, acknowledging requires the following: awareness, honesty and acceptance, which leads us into something we all need more of ... And that's self-compassion. To have compassion for ourselves and all the things that we are going through is an important thing.

You know, the more that we're honest with ourselves, it helps us get to know ourselves. It helps us to be more present. And it allows the moment to be easier, which helps us to make wiser and better choices to move out and to move on to different situations and experiences.

And so, if you're having a tough time -- if you're feeling a little bit overwhelmed -- one of the best things you can do is just pause and ask solve the question: How am I really doing right now?

The second question to ask is: **WHO IS SOMEONE YOU'VE SPENT TIME WITH LATELY, AND WHO DO YOU WISH YOU COULD SPEND MORE TIME WITH?** And so, this is an important thing. Who have you been spending more time with? Who are the people you spend the most time with? And who are some people you would like to be spending some time with?

This is an important question, because it's about one of the most important things in Life, and that is relationships. There's a study done that says the greatest predictor of your health and happiness over time is your relationships. The quality of our lives are directly related to the quality of our relationships.

So who are you spending the most time with? Who are the people that you value enough that you give them time in your life? Who are the ones that believe in you and support you and see the very best in

you? Who are the ones that make you feel safe? Who are the ones that you smile just thinking about them and laugh when you are with them? Because these are the people you want to continue nurturing and making a priority of keeping them in your life by giving time.

And one of the interesting things is: every single one of us has a variety of relationships and a variety of ways of staying in touch and connected in our relationships. Some are face-to-face and in person. Some relationships are more about phone calls or texts or cards. You know, some are about meeting for coffee or going on a trip or watching a game together.

You know, my family, we have a WhatsApp and we daily -- we're in touch with each other. They're mainly in Canada, but we daily connect with each other. I've got the guys I play cards with. I only see them once a month. And I have a friend; I see him once a year. And in all of those ranges are different ways and forms we have to connect and nurture our relationships and our level of closeness and oneness.

And it's good and important for us to all know who our "inner circle" is. Who are the people we value and treasure the most in our lives? Because the truth is, we only get a limited time. And as we get older, life becomes more precious. And who we choose -- who we invest our time with -- becomes even more valuable and more important.

And you lay that on the circumstances that says studies show that, as we get older, we have less and less friends. That it is an important thing for us to think about: Who am I spending time with? How am I keeping my current relationships, but how am I developing and expanding my relationships, as well?

And when it comes to relationships and spending time with people, we also have to look at who am I giving time to that may not be the healthiest relationship or the healthiest way to spend my time with. Sometimes there are people in our lives that kind of drain our energy that can be a little bit negative. And we have to ask: Is this the right way for me to invest my time and energy? And I know the dynamics and the complexities of families and all kinds of different things, you know ... but it's an important thing we all need to think of.

So, in summary, the three things are: Who are you spending time with you enjoy that you want to keep nurturing those relationships and stay connected? Who are the ones that it's time to release or limit or cut those times, because they're not helping your peace and happiness? And, finally, who do you want to spend time with? Who do you want to open space in your life to attract and spend more quality time with?

Again, the greatest indicator of our happiness and health over time is our relationships. So who you choose -- who we all choose -- to spend our time with or not spend our time with is a vital elements to live and enjoy our very best life. A powerful question: Who are you spending time with and who would you like to spend more time with?

The third one is: **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE RECENTLY THAT BROUGHT YOU JOY, AND HOW CAN YOU DO MORE OF IT?** So, what has brought you joy more? What has brought you joy recently? And what would you like? What could you do to have more of it?

Recently, I did a couple of things. One of them was I took a painting class -- a six-week painting class. I don't really think I'm very good at painting. I would have never thought of it, but a friend was doing and said, "*Hey, do you want to come with?*" So, I decided to go with. And so, for six weeks -- it was a watercolor class -- learned how to mix paints and work with different size of brushes; learned how to draw a tree. And it was really, really cool.

And I looked at it and I thought, "*This is horrible!*" And she said to me, "*Don't worry; it'll better next week.*" And so, I looked at it. And then I also noticed it looks better the further away that I hold it.

[Congregants laugh] So, I'm thinking in about a month, if I put it across in my neighbor's yard and look at it, we're going to look pretty good. [Congregants laugh] Pretty good!

Well, I'll tell you, it was challenging, and it was interesting, and it was so much fun that we actually got little booklets to show how to practice different techniques and how to mix different colors. And I know at some point I want to take another six-week class.

But what was really extra cool about it: it really had me appreciate art that's been sitting in my office on the wall and at my house. I look at it now. It's like, "Ah." I can appreciate the perspective and where the light falls and where the shadows are and the different sizes of the branches of the trees. It was like: it has been such a cool thing. It has brought me a lot of joy.

Second thing is, I started bowling, and I took a bowling lesson. And I'll tell you, most of the balls go in the gutter than on the lane, but it's been a lot of fun. And I feel so excited about it. I'm going to get better. And in February, I'm joining a bowling league. [Congregants cheer and applaud] But I need some practice first.

And so both of these have brought me a lot of joy. They've been a lot of fun. It's been a challenge. It's been nice to try something kind of different. And I noticed it has really sparked that childlike joy in me. I feel like a kid when I'm doing these things.

And you remember the Scripture when Jesus said to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must become as a child? To get back to that pure, innocent, joyful, playful nature that is in each and every one of us. You know, life is serious and it's tough, but we can't overlook fun. We can't overlook laughter. We can't overlook silliness and being playful.

So my question of you is: What brings you joy? What makes you feel like a child and laugh and play and feel good? And maybe you could go dancing. Maybe you could host a game night. Maybe join a book club. Maybe go sing karaoke. Maybe bingo. Maybe baked cookies. Maybe go hiking. Maybe eat breakfast for dinner. I don't know what brings you joy, but something. What is it? There are so many things out in the world to bring us joy. The question is: Are we willing to do it? Are we willing to have fun? Are we willing to laugh?

So, what happened to the guy who lit a fire in his canoe to keep warm? He learned that you can't have your kayak and heat it too. [Congregants laugh]

And I just want to say, in the spirit of joy, that's the only joke I'm going to tell for this entire service! [Congregants laugh] I'm going to preserve your joy as much as possible!

You know, there are a lot of fun things that we can do in life to bring out our joy, but true joy comes from within. By knowing the spirit and the love and presence of God – that Source from whom all things are created – that is within us. That is where everlasting joy really, really happens. And to know that connection should bring a smile to all of our faces. Every day we should want to meditate and feel more consciously that true connection, and connect with that spirit of who we are. And our spirit is of peace, love and joy. And to immerse your heart and mind in Spirit to feel peace, to feel love and to feel joy is a powerful thing. Because for us to have joy on the outside, first we need to have joy on the inside.

So, what have you done recently that has brought you joy and how can you do more of it?

And the fourth question to ask ourselves is: **WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU HAVE BEEN PUTTING OFF THAT IS DRAINING YOUR ENERGY?** Anybody have a scenario like this?

Like, I had this leak once, and every time I went by the leak, it just annoyed the heck out of me. And I kept telling myself, *"I'm going to fix that. I'll get that fixed. I'll make that call."* And then, every time I'd just go by, get angry, get disappointed. And that went on for months and months.

Anybody ever have something like that? Something – and you just kept getting mad. You could have done it, but you didn't?

And so, it's stuff like ... Every think ... I've thought, like, *"Hey; I should get my eyes checked. I'd better make an appointment."* Don't make the appointment. You know, I've known people who say, *"Oh, I got an MRI, but I hate it. I need to get an MRI, but I don't like MRIs."* And they put it off.

Whether it's a difficult conversation or a tough decision, it's amazing how we avoid and procrastinate on doing things that are important. Maybe a family issue -- we haven't been honest and addressed. Maybe it's cleaning out your garage.

Here are a couple of mine. I've told myself to review my car and house insurance and evaluate, you know, Geico and State Farm and Progressive and make the best choice. Every time the bill comes, I just sign and say, *"Okay, I'll do that next year. I'll review it next year."* Another one is I've been telling myself I'm going to do my will. Going to do my will. Years have passed. I've done an action here or there ...

But anybody relate to this at all? Procrastinating and putting things off? It is stunning. We all have so many things that are good and important for us to do. It's stunning our level of procrastination.

There's a podcast called *"How Long Does It Take?"* And it said in this that most of the things that we put off take only five minutes to do. Can you believe that? Five minutes! And we're moaning and whining and causing ourselves frustration by just not doing it and putting it off. They said that the majority of things -- even the big ones -- could take less than an hour if we would just do it.

Tell me if these words of the Apostle Paul don't ring true a little bit for you: *"My own behavior baffles me. I find myself doing things I know I should not do and not doing things I know I should."* Anybody relate? [Congregants laugh]

And the question is: Why do we seem to undermine our own success? Why does it seem we try to sabotage and limit ourselves for doing things that will help us and make our lives better and better? You know, maybe it's a lack of worthiness. Maybe it's laziness. Maybe it's a lack of priorities. Maybe it's a lack of discipline.

But one thing for sure is -- it could be all those -- one thing is: we've got to take action. Like Nike said, *"Just do it!"* As Larry the Cable Guy says, *"Get 'er done!"* [Congregants laugh] Take care of business. Take the plunge. Get cracking. Get the show on the road. We've got a whole bunch of different ways we can say it.

But I want to distinguish between being busy and effectively doing the right and best things. And I think that's where it comes to it. We've got to realize what is an important thing for me to do, and just do it. Yes, you'll complain, you'll whine, you'll moan. But after it, we are all going to feel a lot better.

Even Scripture says, *"Faith without works is dead."* At some point, action has to be a part of it. Whether you like it or not, it's the action. And through that action, things begin to change, move, transform and improve.

The final question is: **WHAT IS A NEW THING YOU CAN TRY DURING THE WEEK?** What is a new thing you can try during the week? We all have a pattern of work during the week and rest and play on the weekend. But often on weekend, things get busy; we've got laundry, take care of the pets, something

happened at home, you got a flat tire. Next thing you know, there was no play on the weekend and right back to work.

And so, my question is: What could you try that's new that you could do during the week? Again, dance class, cooking class, yoga class, pottery class. Somebody was talking about the other day of joining a Toastmaster group. Maybe attending a lecture at the local library. And again, maybe a book club. There are all kinds of things that we can be out there doing.

And you get bonus points if you take a friend with you. You get another bonus point if you meet a friend. And you get an even bigger bonus point if you do something that you're not good at. Like, you're not good at singing, you're not good at playing music, and actually taking lessons in those areas. Or languages, as well.

You know, there are benefits to doing something new during the week. The first one is: it helps you stop working. Sometimes it's easy to stay at the computer -- easy to stay working -- but making a commitment to do something outside actually helps us create some balance and some boundaries and infuses some joy and some fun during the work week.

And then the other thing that's important, and that is good about it, is it really helps your brain. Studies at Oxford University showed that trying new things expands our brains and helps us with aging. They did a juggling class for six weeks. One group did it; the other group didn't. Retested at the end, and every single person in the juggling class for six weeks -- brains grew thicker in the area of visual and spatial parts of the brain.

There is something powerful about doing something new and doing it during the week. It will create balance. It will help improve our brains. It will infuse some more fun and joy into our lives. And so my question for you is: What is something new that you'd be willing to try and do during the week?

You know, questions are powerful, because they help us examine and reflect upon how we're living our lives, and how we would like to choose to live our lives in even greater ways. Questions are a powerful thing to do to help us stop and check in and look a little bit deeper into ourselves.

Again, there are no wrong answers! Questions are there to help trigger our awareness; to help us bring clarity; to help us expand and open our minds to live a fuller, a better, and a more engaged life.

So, how are you really doing right now? Who are the people that you've spent time with recently, and who would you like to spend time with? What is something that you've done that has brought you joy that you can do more of? What is something you've been putting off that is draining your energy ... that you will do today? What is something new for you to try and do during the week?

If you're stuck -- you're feeling in a funk -- just pause and ask yourself these five powerful questions.

God bless you all!