


a guide for teens

john m. vitek



Living
the
Questions
Jesus
Asks

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Introduction

The questions Jesus asked the people of his day were life-changing questions. They were questions that got people's attention, made them pause, think, and answer—and, then, commit themselves to a new way of life.

The questions Jesus asked others over two thousand years ago are the same questions he asks each of us today!

Many of the questions Jesus asks are the same ones you may have asked yourself or others. The questions Jesus asks are common sorts of questions, like “Why are you afraid?” and “What are you arguing about?” He also asks some personally challenging questions, like “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” His questions are often quite blunt and to the point; for example, “Are you envious because I am generous?”

Jesus expected those of whom he asked questions to answer in their own words and from their heart, even though he had a clear sense of what the answer ought to be. For instance, after telling the story of the good Samaritan, he asks, “Which of these was a neighbor?” The somewhat obvious answer is “the Samaritan.” But what confused the people of Jesus' day was how someone from another community, an “outsider,” could be a neighbor. Is this still confusing today? Jesus wants you to think about the question and search your heart before answering. In this case he wants you to know what it means to truly be a neighbor (see “Which of these . . . was a neighbor?” on page 39).

In other words *Living the Questions Jesus Asks* is for all of you who are seeking answers to life's big questions.

Within the pages of this book, you will find answers to such timeless questions as these: Who is God? Who is Jesus? Why should I believe in Jesus Christ? What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ? What does it mean to live a Christian life? How am I to treat others?

Living the Questions Jesus Asks is for all of you who believe deeply in Christ and his message, as well as for those of you who are uncertain about your belief or about your desire to come to a deeper knowledge of Christ and his message.

If a warning label could be applied to the cover of this book, it might read: “Caution! Answering the questions Jesus asks may change your life, forever!” Following the way of Christ in the world is simple—love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself—but doing these “simple” things is far from easy. Jesus expects a

radical commitment from you, as you will discover through the questions he asks. This means that he calls you to follow him completely, which requires aligning your whole heart, your whole mind, and all your actions with the will of God. It’s that simple—and yet it’s not that easy. This book, then, is meant to be a help along the way to encourage you, to inspire you, to give you pause, to help you think about the things that matter most in life, and to help you find meaningful answers to life’s big questions.

You may find that as you read this book you will want to talk with others about your faith. Take a risk and do so. The Christian life ought to be shared with others in community, not lived in isolation. So talk with others about your questions, about Jesus’ questions, about the answers you hear in your own heart

and mind, about what the Church teaches. Talking with others about what you read in this book is one of the surest ways to come to greater clarity and peace in your mind and heart.

Living the Questions Jesus Asks contains twenty-six chapters, one chapter for each of Jesus' questions. Within each chapter you will find five sections: Jesus asks you, search your mind, hear your tradition, commit your spirit, and pray your heart.

Jesus Asks You

At the start of each reflection is an actual question that Jesus asked, as recorded in the Bible. Following the question is an excerpt from the Bible showing the wider context in which Jesus asked the question. You may wish to have a Bible on hand to look up the passage so you can read the entire chapter or more.

Search Your Mind

Each question that Jesus asked is recast in this section as if Jesus were asking you the question today, which he is. This section offers some thoughts for reflection on Jesus' question and some ways it has been answered by others. The important point to remember in this section is that you are being challenged to answer Jesus' question in your own way.

Hear Your Tradition

Have you ever asked, "What does the Church teach about this topic?" This section provides a brief comment on what the Church believes, related to Jesus' question and his message. Catholic Christians believe that God's word is revealed through both the Bible and Tradition—the living transmission of the Good News of Jesus Christ through

the Church. Many of the quotes you will read in this section come from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, a compendium of Catholic doctrine.

Commit Your Spirit

One of the main teachings of Jesus and the Church is that words of belief are not the whole story. Following the message of Jesus Christ requires both word and deed—professing and living your faith. This section offers some simple ideas to help you commit yourself to living your faith in everyday life. The suggestions are often simple, but not necessarily easy.

Pray Your Heart

The final section of each chapter offers words that invite you to pray. The prayers are intended to help you open your heart and mind to the message of

Jesus and the Church. Faith is a gift, freely given by God to those who seek it and open their heart and mind to God's grace. So don't forget to pray for what you seek.

At some point while reading this book, or perhaps after you've finished reading it, you may have questions or comments of your own. If you would like to, please e-mail your questions or comments to me at jvitek@smp.org. I'd be happy to hear from you.

God be with you as you ponder the questions Jesus asks, and may we all have the courage to follow the way of Jesus Christ, which is the way of truth and life. Peace.



John M. Vitek
President, Saint Mary's Press

Jesus

ASKS YOU

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”

—Matthew 16:13–17

Search Your Mind

If Jesus met you on a street corner today and asked, “Who do you say that I am?” how would you answer? Would you describe Jesus as a great person who once lived? Would you describe Jesus as a great prophet? Would you describe Jesus as the Son of God, true God from true God, the Savior of the world?

For Christians, Jesus is far more than just a historical person who lived a holy life. He is the Christ, the “anointed,” the Word of God made flesh, our Lord and Savior. He has perfectly revealed God’s intention for the world and how we are to live our lives. He continues to be among us through the Holy Spirit, leading us and teaching us the way to eternal life, happiness, and fulfillment. He is the way, the truth, and the life. To

follow Jesus is to follow the will of God, the Father, the Creator of all that is good.

Who do others say that Jesus is? Do you ever talk with your friends about who Jesus is? Do you ever talk about Jesus' significance in your life and in the life of the world?

Hear Your Tradition

“We believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth, born a Jew of a daughter of Israel at Bethlehem at the time of King Herod the Great and the emperor Caesar Augustus, a carpenter by trade, who died crucified in Jerusalem under the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of the emperor Tiberius, is the eternal Son of God made man.” (CCC, no. 423)

Commit Your Spirit

Sometime in the next day or two, commit yourself to having a conversation with at least one of your friends. Ask your friend, “Who do you say Jesus is?” Let this conversation be a time when you openly talk with each other about your belief in Jesus. Consider making a commitment with your friend to talk each week about your belief in Jesus and your questions of faith.

Pray Your Heart

Help me, Lord, to know more deeply who you are in my life and in the world. I ask that my mind, my heart, and my thoughts be opened to whatever you wish to reveal to me. For this I pray. Amen.