

Lay Down & Take Up

Seeking Greater Dependence on Jesus
Lent 2019

Note about the answer guide: There will certainly be a range of correct answers. The answer guide will not give you all the possible correct answers but will give you some suggestions. Do not feel bad if your answer doesn't match the answer guide—you may still have a good answer. The guide is here to give you some direction if you feel lost or to give you another perspective. The goal is not to get all the answers right, but to grow in our dependence on Jesus.

Lesson 1: Lay Down Worry, Take Up Daily Dependence

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

1. What do you worry about? How have your worries changed over the course of your life? Why do we worry?

***Answers will vary based on your own personal experiences.**

2. The most common commandment in the Bible is “Do not fear.” Do not be anxious is really the same command. What sin are we committing when we are anxious or afraid? What do you think is at the core of our struggles with worry?

***When we worry we are committing the sin of unbelief in God. At the core, it is saying that we don't really trust that God knows what He is doing or that He has forgotten about us. What kinds of things come out of our worry? Control, irrational thinking, isolation, poor decision-making, sleeplessness, joylessness, broken relationships, and medical issues like ulcers. Worry enslaves us and God wants us to live in trust and freedom.**

We tend to have a hard time differentiating whether we are being concerned, worrying, or have medical anxiety. Concern is paying attention to the problem we are facing and giving it appropriate attention, resources, and prayer. Yet so often concern turns into worry as the problem seems beyond our control and resources. The signs of worry are seen in the fruit of our life such as irrational thinking, paralysis of action, sleepless nights, over-controlling situations, and irritability—to name a few. It can be helpful to differentiate worry from medical anxiety where there is an actual chemical imbalance in our brain. Medical anxiety is beyond our control. Part of the challenge is that concern, medical anxiety, and worry can all be mixed together when life is overwhelming. Whether we are experiencing worry, anxiety, or concern, we should use that to drive us to depend on Jesus more deeply, acknowledging our dependence on Him. Jesus is not surprised by our worry, anxiety, or concern. He seeks to meet us in our place of need.

3. What does it look like to seek His kingdom, practically speaking?

***On some level, it is about our priorities: the things that are important to God should be important to us and the things that break God's heart should break our hearts. To seek His Kingdom is to desire to fall in love with Him more each day and the fruit of that love will be our love for one another. Seeking His Kingdom gives us an eternal perspective and we see the value of putting others needs before our own desires.**

4. If someone were to follow you around for a week, would they sense that you trust in God's provision? How has this been (or not been) displayed in your life?

***Answers will vary based on your own personal experiences. Consider sharing one time where you have failed to trust God and one time where you did!**

5. "Seek first the Kingdom of God" is the key to this text, and the key to dependence. Why is Jesus as your king more freeing than trying to be the king of your own life?

***When we trust that Jesus is the sovereign King and believe that He loves us, He is for us, and with us then there is freedom from having to control the outcome of things. We should still be responsible to do what God has called us to do, to live in obedience, to live in love...but we are freed from agonizing about how things will turn out. We can love people and be free from needing their acceptance and approval.**

6. Jesus the King has a better way of life to offer you, the Kingdom offers a better vision of the good life, and the people of the Kingdom offer a deeper community. What would be a practical step in your life to move toward more fully participating in the Kingdom life?

***Answers will vary based on where you are in life. There are a lot of good answers out there. Consider how you can move towards Jesus through a new spiritual practice like reading through the Bible, or how to engage in community more fully through a small group or Sunday community, or where can you engage in the mission of God through serving others. These just scratch the surface of possibilities.**

7. Much of our anxiety is born out of displaced sense of belonging and security. Even though it creates anxiety and insecurity, why do we keep going back to seeking belonging and security (dependence) in the kingdom(s) of the world? What does it look like to depend on Jesus for identity, security, and belonging?

***Most of our problems stem from our identity issues. Our culture wrongly suggests that who you are is based on your successes and failures, or on your desires, or even on who likes you. On some level, this goes back to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose to eat of the tree of good and evil. They decided that they wanted to decide what makes them right apart from God. This shifted our identity from the solid ground of being "right" just because we are His, to letting our self-worth be decided by what others think of us and whether or not they approve of us. When our self-esteem is based on cultural standards we live enslaved to so many things that are really outside of our control. But Jesus came to redeem us and give us a new identity. When we trust in Christ, our identity is not based on anything we do, but solely on what Christ has done for us on the cross. Because we are "in Christ," He calls us His beloved and we are accepted, secure, and belong to Him. Nothing can separate us from Him.**

Lesson 2: Lay Down Judgment, Take Up Discernment

Read Matthew 7:1-6.

1. What bumper stickers create an internal reaction in you? What is the immediate judgment you have about that driver?

***Answers will vary.**

2. In what other areas in your life do you instinctively judge others? What is at the root of that judgment? What is the emotion in your heart toward that person?

***Answers will vary.**

3. "Do not judge." What does Jesus mean by this? What are some ways it has been misinterpreted?

***Jesus is saying do not condemn people to hell, do not give up on people, do not write them off.**

*** Misinterpretations include: thinking that Jesus is saying that every behavior is ok, or it is not our business to interfere, or that everyone has their own right and wrong.**

4. What does it mean to take the plank out of your own eye? Why is it necessary?

***Jesus is pointing out that we are all sinners. We all have issues that we need to deal with before God. When we don't deal with our sin, our sins obscure our perspective of others and it keeps us from being effective in loving them and helping them deal with their issues. The sins that are most often planks for us are self-righteousness, pride, superiority, and self-reliance.**

5. How do these Scriptures help us understand what Jesus is trying to teach us about judging? (See Galatians 6:1-4, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 4:5.)

a. Galatians 6:1-4: Paul is calling us to life of restoration. That we should continually be helping each other find freedom from the entanglements of sin. We should come along one another with love and gentleness. We all struggle with sin and need each other to point us to Jesus as our hope.

b. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13: Paul calls us not to condemn those outside the church. That is not our job. We cannot legislate morality to the worldly. Our job is to love them. But inside the church we should face our sin and help free fellow believers from the bondage and destruction of sin. When believers are unrepentant of their sin, Paul calls us to remove them until they repent.

c. John 7:24: Jesus is calling us to not look at externals but to dig deeper than that. What does it mean to judge with right judgment? To use discernment. To see your

own need for Jesus. To see what is right, true, and lovely. To use wisdom to see what is the most helpful loving response in this situation.

d. 1 Corinthians 4:5: read verses 1-5 to see more of the context. The call in this context seems that Paul is calling us not to compare ourselves to one another. For we are in Christ and we all belong to Him. Paul reminds us that we will all stand before the true judge Jesus and everything will be seen clearly.

6. One of the best tips is “See yourself as the biggest sinner in the room.” How does this mentality change how you respond when your coworker, friend, child, spouse, or roommate messes up?

***One of the signs of Christian maturity is that we become more aware of our need for Jesus as we become more aware of our sinfulness. On some level, we may be sinning less as we mature, but we are more aware of our sins like pride, self-righteousness, and control, for example. Seeing ourselves as greatly needing Jesus helps us to approach others with humility, gentleness, and love. It helps us to forgive them more quickly and increases our awareness of how to encourage them to find freedom from their sinful struggles. We are all equal before the cross.**

7. Notice that Jesus says you are to take the speck out of your brother’s eye . . . which means that you should help your brother deal with the sin in his life. Besides seeing yourself as the bigger sinner, what are some other principles that are helpful in coming alongside someone who is struggling with a specific sin?

***There are many possible answers to this question including things like: Begin with prayer, ask the Spirit to guide you, confess your own failures and need for Jesus, authenticity regarding how their actions made you feel, but assurance that your love for them isn’t conditional on their behavior.**

8. Judgment is more about yourself than it is about the person you are judging. How does this perspective help point you toward discernment? How might this bring you into a deeper need for Jesus?

***When we condemn others it is often a failure to see our own shortcomings and sins. Condemning others reveals that we are leaning more on our own self-righteousness than the work of Jesus on the cross for us. When you catch yourself judging someone else, or comparing yourself to someone else...stop in that moment and confess it. Ask Jesus to show you His grace, His acceptance, and His new secure identity that you have in Him.**

Lesson 3: Lay Down Your Doubt, Take Up Reliance on God

Read Matthew 7:7-12.

1. Describe a time when you gave a really good gift to a family member or friend. What did it feel like giving that gift? What were some of the emotions involved?

***Answers will vary based on your personal experiences.**

2. Discuss a time when you felt God providing for you. What were some of the ways you saw His hand at work in that situation?

***Answers will vary based on your personal experiences.**

3. In our affluent culture, we can live in the delusion that we don't need God very much. Where do you see that in your own life? What gets in the way of you asking God for help or provision?

***Answers will vary based on your personal experiences.**

4. Why do you think believers in third-world countries might experience greater expressions of faith and joy in their walk with Jesus?

***For many, they have a greater sense of their need for Jesus. Often, our ties to our material possessions and "do it ourselves" attitude obscures the glory of Jesus from us. Most third-world countries are more relational than we are and find more joy in relationships, whether that is relationship with God or others.**

5. What is it that you receive by asking, seeking, and knocking? The Holy Spirit! Why is the Holy Spirit a better gift than the answer we are usually looking for?

***The Holy Spirit is the power of God working within us. The Spirit knows better than us what we really need. The Spirit is the one who can change people's hearts, particularly our own.**

6. Satan tries the same lies on us that he used with Adam and Eve in the garden: that God isn't really good, that He is withholding the best from us, and that we are better off being dependent on ourselves. Where have you seen these lies show up in your life? How do we combat these lies?

***Answers will vary based on your personal experiences.**

7. No one loves you more than Jesus does. No one loves you better than Jesus does. Read Philippians 4:6-7. How does relying on Jesus give you peace and give you freedom from the burden of trying to control outcomes?

***It is not up to you. The pressure is off. You can rest in what Jesus has done for you and what He is continually doing in you, through you, and around you. Isaiah 30:15 says, "In rest and repentance shall be your salvation. In quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you would have none of it." Peace comes from abiding in the Vine (Jesus!) and clinging to His love for us.**

Lesson 4: Lay Down What's Easy, Take Up What's Life-Giving

Read Matthew 7:13-14.

1. When was a time that you followed “the crowd” and you wished you hadn’t? What was the outcome?

***Answers will vary by personal experiences.**

2. Who is Jesus warning in this section? Who is shut out of the kingdom?

***Jesus is warning those who think they are right before God because they think they are good people. He is warning the self-righteous and self-reliant.**

3. Notice Matthew 7:12. Most people think they are living the Golden Rule, and yet they are on the broad road. People on the broad way do good works to feel good about themselves and try to appease God. It is full of people trying to save themselves through self-righteousness. This is the path of most religions. What example have you seen from religions that teach you must perform in order to earn God’s favor?

***Most religions teach that you must do good to be right before God. You should try to think of specific examples. The Bible teaches that Jesus came to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, that He makes us right before God by dying on the cross for our sins.**

4. Why do people naturally avoid the narrow path? Why do we gravitate toward the broad path?

***In our sin nature, we think that we can make ourselves right before God by being good. Or some even think they are so good that they don’t need God’s help at all. We naturally are bent inward, wanting to be in control of our life.**

5. Why do you think our American culture increasingly is doing away with the idea of hell and promoting the ideas of pluralism (all roads lead to heaven)?

***Part of the fall in the Garden of Eden is that people want to decide what is right and wrong apart from God. Cultures particularly do not tend to submit to the wisdom of God, so right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right in the eyes of culture. Our culture has become increasingly humanistic, believing that we are generally good people who don’t need a Savior. Jesus says that He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Him. Culture says this is narrow-minded. But the Bible says this gift of grace through Jesus is open to anyone who will trust in Jesus.**

6. What is the narrow door? Why is it narrow? How do you enter through the narrow door? (See also Luke 13:21-30, John 10:9.)

***Jesus is the door. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The only way through the door is believing in Him. To enter, we must first see our need for a Savior. Then we must trust what the Bible promises us, that Jesus makes us right with God.**

7. What is necessary to receive the grace that Jesus offers? If grace is free, why do we struggle to receive it?

***All we need is to know we need Jesus. As the hymn goes, all the fitness Jesus requires is that we feel our need for Him. Or as Tim Keller says, “all we need is nothing; all we need is need.” Grace flows downhill to those who know they it.**

***We struggle to receive grace because we don't want to be needy. We want to be self-reliant and self-righteous. We don't want to admit we don't have our act together. It is like Isaiah 30:15 says “In rest and repentance is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.”**

8. Why do we resist dying to self-righteousness, self-reliance, and selfishness? What is the fruit of your life when you choose “self” at the center of your life?

***Consider those moments when you know you are selfish. How does it impact your relationships, your heart, your mood, and how you treat others? Selfishness is destructive for relationships. Selfishness makes our hearts hard. We want our own way.**

*** You may want to watch this 8½ minute video from CPC Pastor James Madsen at cpconline.org/discipleship.**

9. When we follow Jesus and accept His gift of salvation, we are not guaranteed a life of ease. What is the life that Jesus offers?

***He promises us the abundant life. He promises that we can find a secure identity in Him. We are freed from having to live for the approval of others and our own self-acceptance. In Christ, we stand holy and blameless before the Father. We are loved, accepted, secure, and have an eternal purpose.**

Lesson 5: Lay Down Pretense, Take Up Abiding

Read Matthew 7:15-23.

1. Share about a time when you've been totally fooled by someone or some product that made a promise it didn't keep.

***Answers will vary based on personal experiences.**

2. Who and what are the greatest influencers in your life? Who are the voices you listen to most? Why?

***Answers will vary based on personal experiences.**

***Paul Tripp says that no one talks to you more than you do. What do those internal voices say to you?**

3. How do you recognize a false teacher? What kind of things do false religious teachers promise?

***False teachers often teach a part of Scripture but not the whole message of the Gospel. There is a sliver of truth to what they say. Often what they are promising you is an easier path or a promise to be in control of your life. Maybe a formula for how you can get God to give you what you want. There are also undertones or overt messages that you need to try harder to please God or to be all you can be.**

4. Jesus often uses images of bad fruit and unhealthy vineyards to describe the religious Pharisees who sought to produce fruit by their own effort. Read John 15:1-8. What is the key to exhibiting good fruit in our life?

***Abiding in Jesus. Spending time with Him. Trusting Him. Knowing Him. As we grow in love with Him, we grow in loving what He loves and valuing what He values.**

5. How does greater dependence on Jesus lead to more fruit of the Spirit in our life? What does greater dependence on Jesus look like?

***The more we rest in Jesus, the more control the Spirit has in our life. The Spirit changes our heart as our heart grows more in love with Jesus. We do not grow more patient by standing in the longest line at Costco, but by sitting at the feet of Jesus more often. The fruit of the Spirit do not come from trying harder but through connecting with Him. The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, etc.) are not there for ourselves, they are a gift to other people. The fruit of my faith in Jesus is that other people get to experience love, joy, peace, and kindness as they interact with me. They experience Jesus in my life.**

***Greater dependence on Jesus can look like starting not to care what other people think of me. I am no longer a slave to the approval of others. I also die to what I think of myself. I only live in the light of who Jesus says that I am. I believe that to be true and then I live and love in confident obedience.**

6. In this context, what do you think it means to be known by Jesus? What other Scripture would you use to back that up?

***We often think it is a matter of doing good works or even acknowledging that Jesus existed. But the Epistle of James tells us that even demons believe that God is one (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The gospels are full of stories of demons knowing that Jesus is the Lord and King of the Universe. But it doesn't make them believers. It does not save them. To know Jesus is to know that you need Him as Savior and to trust Him solely to make you right with God. Trusting in Him to make us righteous before God, we also submit to Him as our Lord. Consider for example John 10, particularly verses 26-30. Jesus knows His sheep, the sheep believe in Jesus and have eternal life, and they follow Him.**

7. Read John 6:28-29. One work that pleases the Father is daily dependence on Jesus. (See also John 3:16-18) What does that look like? Why do we struggle to do so?

***The main work of the believer is to believe in Jesus. This is really a moment by moment decision to trust in Him, to get our identity in Him, and to live for Him. We struggle because we receive so many messages from the world telling us that you need to take control of your life, you need to be all you can be, you can have it all, and so many more messages with YOU at the center.**

8. The Westminster Catechism reminds us that the chief end of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. What would the fruit of your life look like if you lived this out? What is one practical step in learning to enjoy God more deeply?

***The fruit of our life is that the people around us would feel so loved and cared for. We would experience freedom from people-pleasing and self-pity. We would experience joy apart from circumstances, and be fully present to what God was doing in this moment. We would experience freedom from trying to control outcomes.**

***There are many possible answers to this. Some may include worshipping God throughout the week, just sitting and watching the sun go down, being quiet before God, just enjoying the presence of a toddler or puppy, walking along the beach or through the forest aware of the wonder of each thing God has made, or even just sitting with a friend being fully present and focused on them. We should practice turning our hearts towards God, remembering His love for us and hooking into the promises of God.**

Lesson 6: Lay Down Foolishness, Take Up Jesus

Read Matthew 7:24-29.

1. Everyone builds their lives on something. Over the span of your life, what type of things have you tried to build your identity on? Where have you sought adequacy and acceptance? How has that worked for you?

***Answers will vary by personal experiences.**

2. As you consider these questions, what idols are prevalent in our culture and in your own life? (It might be helpful to know that Luther and Calvin both said that our hearts are idol factories, and there is never a time when we don't struggle with idols in our life.)

***So many possible answers! We can make anything into an idol.**

3. Difficult times often reveal deep truths to us. In what ways have trials or tribulations exposed the ways you've sought security in something other than Jesus?

***Answers will vary based on your personal experiences.**

4. The person of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus are inseparable for Matthew. How is Jesus our rock? Why is He a more stable identity for us than our idols?

***Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He does not change. His love endures forever. Our status before Him has nothing to do with our performance. It is solely based on what He has accomplished for us on the cross. Nothing can separate us from His love, not even our failure. Our idols, on the other hand, are never satisfied. They always want a little more. We have the illusion that we control them, but in reality we are enslaved to them.**

5. What does it look like in your life (identity, relationships, choices, successes, failures, finances, work) when you are finding security in Jesus? What is the fruit of resting in Jesus?

***Peace. Freedom from anxiety. Freedom from trying to control situations. Freedom from trying to manipulate people to try to get my needs met out of them. I can just love people right where they are. I can love them without expecting anything in return. My relationships become deeper and more meaningful.**

6. There are verses throughout the Bible that tell us that how Jesus meets our core heart needs when we depend on Him. Look up the following verses—and add additional verses that come to mind. When you read these verses, how does your heart respond?

a) Love – 1 John 4:10, Romans 5:8 (**John 3:16, Romans 8:38, Eph 4:32**)

- b) Acceptance – Romans 15:7, Romans 8:1 (**Romans 10:13, Gal. 4:7**)
 - c) Security – John 10:27-29 (**1 Cor. 15:57-58, Hebrews 13:5, Eph. 2:8**)
 - d) Belonging – John 1:12, Galatians 4:6 (**Eph. 1:6, John 10:14, Gal. 3:26, 1 Peter 2:9**)
 - e) Identity – 2 Corinthians 5:17 (**Romans 8:14, Romans 8:36, Gal. 4:26, Romans 7:4**)
 - f) Purpose – 2 Corinthians 5:20 (**Eph. 2:10, Romans 12:1, Mt 28:19-20, 2 Peter 1:5**)
7. It becomes apparent in the Sermon on the Mount that it is impossible to obey the commands of Jesus without knowing the heart of Jesus Himself, and that to live the words Jesus offers us is an invitation to greater dependence and joy in Him. How do we come to know the heart of Jesus through His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?

***Matthew 1:21 reminds us that Jesus will save His people from their sins. Part of Jesus' heart in this sermon is to express how much we need Him to save us from our sins. And part of how Jesus saves us is to be the one who perfectly lives out the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount. We fail to live out this righteousness, but Jesus doesn't. When we see our need for His righteousness and receive His provision of grace, our own heart starts to change. We start to grow to love what Jesus loves. The fruit of greater dependence on Jesus leads us to be more loving towards others. So much of the teaching on the Sermon Mount seems to hinge on our lack of love/dependence on God, and our lack of love for others. The heart of Jesus is that we as the community of God would experience deeper and more loving relationships with God and with others.**