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A Kingdom Called Desire

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ONE

A Kingdom Called Desire

I have grown very tired of the question *how*. This question seems to permeate every inch of the world I live in. How-to books sell millions of copies every year promising that we can master a myriad of topics from weight loss to making it rich in the stock market. Every author gives us a different set of steps to take and makes promises to us that are never kept.

When we wake up feeling like crap again because we failed to climb the how-to ladder of success, in a matter of minutes we will see yet another commercial, infomercial, afternoon talk show, website, or news clip that points us in a new direction with another set of promises and steps to take to fix ourselves. The crazy part is we run to it like little kids running after the ice-cream truck in the heat of summer.

I am really tired of it, though. I am weary because the ice-cream truck never slows down for us, and after so many years I have begun to realize the truck didn't even have ice cream in it. It just played the carnival noises in the megaphone and got us all excited, making us drop whatever it

was we were doing and rush outside to catch our hopes and dreams, only to see the rear brake lights fading into the sunset. We just stood there with our handful of change and dissipating hope.

In many ways we have been robbed by the question of how. The question of how betrays us because it assumes the answers we long for are outside of us, held secretly by others, and only accessible for a small monthly fee. That's not true, though. There are no secret answers, only lived moments that create some type of personal knowledge.

That knowledge may have worked for one guy who lost weight and wrote a book. So we see that the guy who wrote a book on how to lose weight actually went from fat to thin — and he looks a lot happier and healthier — and we want that too, so we buy his book. I think I own all those books.

Those diet books contradict each other in many ways except one: they all tell you to eat less and exercise more. But most of us don't want to do that. Rather than doing the eat-less-move-more diet we hide behind an assumed ignorance. "I don't know how to lose weight." I don't have the answer. I need an expert to tell me how, and this skinny guy who used to be a fat guy has the answers I need.

We hide behind the question of how. *I've* hidden behind the question of how.

The betrayal isn't really in the question of how. The betrayal comes from a culture that has convinced us to look to someone else to find what we most deeply want. Some *thing* will make your life full or happy.

In one sense it's true: if you need to lose weight and you do, you will feel better; if you get out of debt, you will find freedom. I don't know how much the ShamWow will help your happiness, but after I watched the infomercial I really wanted it. A consumer

I am tired of the question *how*. I want to drill down deeper into my soul and ask a better question.

culture depends on us being paralyzed by the question of how in order for it to work. It creates a codependent relationship where we will endlessly clamor to the experts to tell us what we most deeply need. We must be honest, though. We are not much happier after years of seeking the experts' advice. In fact, most of us take our how-to books to Goodwill along with barely used exercise equipment we bought with great hopes that in just fifteen minutes a day our lives would be forever changed. Mine was called the Power Rider, and it made you go up and down like you were riding a bull or something, and I found riding it quite embarrassing, but not as embarrassing as when I think about how I bought it and just hung clothes on it for years until I threw it out.

So I am tired of the question *how*. I want to reclaim my freedom from having to ask it. I want to drill down deeper into my soul and the soul of our culture and ask a better question. The question may not have a simple answer or be able to be packaged and sold, but it may lead me to another question that takes me even farther into the deepest parts of me. Somewhere in there, somewhere in you, we may find

a place where transformation resides and the person with whom it resides.

In his book *The Answer to How Is Yes*, Peter Block tackles this very issue and makes the observation that “good questions work on us, we don’t work on them.” He mentions that the right questions are about values, purpose, aesthetics, human connections, and deeper philosophical inquiry.¹

Essentially he is saying the good questions are really about *desire*. What is it we most deeply want? Every advertisement taps into something deeper in you than your interest in the product. “If I had that I would enjoy my family more, I would embrace life with action, I would feel better about who I am, I wouldn’t feel so ashamed, I would be a better dad, people would finally be impressed with me, I would feel like I made something of myself, my life would be easier, it would help me get out of my nowhere job . . .”

And the list goes on and on.

The list is endless because our desires run so deep and yet barely get touched by anyone other than advertisers seeking to get us to want what they are selling. So where does all of that desire go? I think it gets stuffed deep down inside us somewhere, because in a culture that has par-

**The good questions
are really about *desire*.
What is it we most
deeply want?**

alyzed us by convincing us we don’t know how to do much in and of ourselves, desire scares us to death.

1. Peter Block, *The Answer to How Is Yes* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 27, 39.

Why does desire scare us so much? Why is it that we go through the motions of living by trading our deepest desires for cheaper desires that we know are making promises to us they can't keep? Why do we run like kids after the ice-cream truck when we know it is empty or we'll never catch it? I wonder if we are afraid—afraid that when we touch that thing we desire, we won't know how to deal with it.

So let's say I think my desire is for my kids to be happy. I really want something more than that, but I am not sure what it is yet. So I settle for trying to make them happy. I wander around some dead ends for a while, buying them what they want and taking them where they want to go. But they still whine and complain. So then I listen to some expert who tells me that kids do better when they spend time with their parents. What they really need is time with me!

So I think about it awhile, then reset my schedule, making sure I'm home for family dinners and game night. I'm in the room with them, but it still feels as if something is missing. What is it? Is it me again? I am here, they are happy, but there is something more. Am I here emotionally and spiritually, or just physically? Are they content and do they have a deep sense of joy, or are they just happy because I bought them more stuff?

Then let's say I reflect some more and come to a place where I can actually name my deepest desire and embrace it: I love my kids! Nothing in the world can express the power of the love I feel for them. I feel that in me; I embrace

it in me. Because of that love, I desire deep, personal, fatherly connection with my kids. Then something in me gets scared and is convinced I don't know *how* to make that deep connection happen. So I shun it or stuff it or avoid it, and—rather than creating my own story, together with my kids—in my fear of not knowing how, I simply rent another movie and try to enjoy someone else's story for the next ninety minutes or so with my kids.

Movies are fun, but they are not a substitute for making my own adventures with my kids. They are just a great way to hang out together on a Friday night. And this scenario repeats itself every day in every life. The question of *how* paralyzes me from just being fully present with my kids. In reality all I have to do is go do something, anything, pay attention, laugh, play, listen, make mistakes and memories, and feel that deep place fill with love.

So I am tired of asking how.

I am tired of cheap desires.

I am tired of avoiding the deeper desires.

One of the most damaging places for the question *how* is in our spiritual lives. The question itself has a place, but it should not be primary, and it should show up a ways down the road. The better questions, the ones that work on us and in us—those are the questions we need to deal with sooner.

In the West, Christians have leaned too heavily on the pragmatics of *how*. When we assume the answer we most deeply need is an answer outside of us that only an expert

can give, we become a paralyzed people waiting to be told what to do next:

Go to church on Sunday? Check.

Belong to small group? Check.

Read Bible and pray daily? Check.

Wear appropriate Christian apparel, listen to Christian radio, home school, work in the soup kitchen, write letters to missionaries, take casserole to church potluck, drink fair-trade coffee, work to alleviate extreme poverty, eat vegetarian, recycle, sign human rights petition? Check, check, check, and check.

When we turn following Jesus into a product instead of a relationship, the only question we end up asking is, how do we do that? And we look for clues in what everyone else is doing and do that too. Pretty soon we are doing all sorts of things but we don't know why anymore.

I realize this is a tremendous oversimplification, but time and time again it comes back to haunt us. Truthfully a lot of the books we buy in regards to following Jesus are couched in this how-to language as well: Will someone out there tell me *how* to follow Jesus?

Jesus didn't spend a lot of time answering that question.

When we turn following Jesus into a product instead of a relationship, the only question we end up asking is, how do we do that? And we look for clues in what everyone else is doing, and do that too.

I find that to be really hopeful. When he did answer the how question, he did so in a way that was very personal to the one he was talking to. For example, a rich young ruler came and asked Jesus how to gain eternal life (Luke 18:18–27). Jesus told him to keep the commandments, to which the man basically replied, “Been there. Done that!” He had a checklist for salvation, licking his pencil as he marked off each step.

So Jesus masterfully tapped into the deeper question of desire in the rich young man’s life. The question is: What are you really putting your security in? What do you really think is going to save you? For that rich young man, the answer was his own personal wealth and his ability to do the right things. That’s where his security was. And when Jesus pointed out one area where the young man couldn’t do the right thing, the man gave up.

In other places Jesus simply asked people, “What do you want?” or “Do you want to get well?” — questions that pushed right past the how-to questions and went directly to the issues most important to the person, the issues of desire.

“Do you really want to follow me or do you need your money to make you feel secure?”

“Do you want to be healed or do you need to be sick because you don’t believe anyone will care about you if you are made well?”

The questions are deep, involved, not simple or reduced, and they cannot be packaged into a one-size-fits-all container. What do you desire most? Do you really want Jesus,

or do you want beauty, a career, success, and happy relationships? Do you really want Jesus, or do you just want to fill in some boxes to prove that you are saved?

To the rich young ruler, Jesus said, primarily, “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). Get rid of the checklists. Stop thinking you can buy your way into heaven. Follow me. Quit asking *how* and starting asking *who!*

Sadly, I sometimes wonder if there is much of an audience for this type of spiritual undertaking today. We have traded in a great spiritual lifelong adventure with Jesus for religious chores that we can check off our list. The deeper questions that deal with the mystery of following Jesus—the parables that leave us puzzled, the art of *being* in Christ in a world of *doing* things for Christ, the dilemmas of pain and suffering—these questions get thrown out because we are too busy checking off our boxes, proving we are Christians. In throwing out the deeper questions we trade in the deeper desires for the cheaper ones.

Recently I have eliminated the question of how, especially in regard to following Jesus. I just quit asking that question. I am discovering and discarding my cheaper desires in order to pursue my deeper desires. I want a faith that isn't reduced, and I want to sit inside the questions Jesus and his kingdom cause me to ask and to sit inside the questions they are asking of me. I want to live into a new way

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of being—because Jesus not only addresses our desires; he created them.

Transformation happens not through more how-to spirituality but by reclaiming our freedom so we can embrace the beauty and complexity of the kingdom of God. We have the freedom to realize we don't have to figure it all out or understand everything, but we can live in relationship with the living God through Christ.

Being who we were created to be in the midst of his kingdom and allowing Jesus to lead us to wherever he wants to take us ultimately will always make us come back to a place of desire, where our emotional life meets our faith and our reason in a beautiful way.

What I find in Jesus and his kingdom does not make me tired; instead he awakens me and invites me to learn to be and to become in ways unique to me. Jesus brings us freedom. We will know we are getting close to Jesus' kingdom when our deepest joy is confronted by our greatest fears. But if we press into those deeper questions, joys, and fears, they may open us up to the unlimited possibilities of living into the life of Jesus.

Some of our most difficult choices occur when we are unable or unwilling to admit that if the ice-cream truck is empty then we don't really know what we want. For me, realizing the truck will never stop at my house means I am left with some really big questions.

What if Jesus wants me to address a desire that is false? What if that false desire has become a safe place for me to

live because I don't have to ask the deeper questions or examine the deeper places and desires within me? I can mask all of that by trying to figure out *how* — how to fix, how to change, how to understand, or how to master just about everything.

Instead Jesus asks me to embrace the life he has given me. He asks me to live that life out in the kingdom he has created. Tasks get turned into relationships and have-to's become want-to's, but all of it will remain at arm's length if I refuse to sit inside the question, what do I desire most? The question forces me to consider there is a distinct possibility that I don't desire God the most.

What do you want? What do you really want?

Isn't it weird that it's so hard to answer that question? Shouldn't we know the answer?

In Matthew 13, Jesus is teaching his followers about the kingdom. Halfway through the chapter we find one verse, one pregnant sentence that will ruin you if you really understand what he is talking about. It's the forty-fourth verse in the chapter, and it reads like this.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Jesus places a picture of the kingdom before us — a picture of desire. In my most honest moment, this picture confronts my greatest fears with my greatest desires and opens up into a picture of his unlimited possibilities.

We see the kingdom tap into this person's deep desire:
A treasure hidden . . .

We see the kingdom tap into perhaps his greatest fear:
Losing all he had . . .

We see the kingdom confront that fear with something larger than all his fears.

We see his desire transformed before our eyes so that in his joy he goes and sells all he has to gain what he most deeply wants.

In a one-sentence parable I am invited to begin asking significant questions about my life, my heart, and my desire. Why don't I desire Jesus and the kingdom like that? What do I fear losing in order to buy this field? Why doesn't this scenario feel like joy to me?

But there hidden in my confusion over the parable is the story my heart is telling about what I desire.

I want security *now*, in this world. And my stuff, my things, my cash — they all give me a sense of security.

My heart isn't attracted to the kingdom like this man's was. What am I missing? What am I not seeing that he saw?

I really do put my trust in things I can touch and feel in the here and now. This invisible kingdom is hard for me to trust.

What happens if I sell everything I have to buy the treasure and it turns out to be disappointing?

What other thing in my life gives me this kind of joy?

What *would* I be willing to sell it all for?

The questions keep rising up from somewhere deep

within me, and I think Jesus wanted that to happen; in fact I believe he is behind the whole process. When I sit here in the midst of these questions — where my heart is confronted by Jesus' vision of the kingdom — something seismic takes place. I face up to the question Jesus is asking: What do you really want?

The kingdom does that to us. Jesus does that to us. Jesus wants us to sit with those questions, be driven to the Bible and to our knees with them.

What do you really desire? What do you really want? Take some time and think about that. Read that parable and chew on it awhile and jot down your own list of questions. What do I really want? Jesus is interested in your answer because Jesus is interested in becoming what you really want. "Sell everything you have. . . . Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

Jesus answered that question for himself. He knows what he truly desires. In his joy he left all he had: the perfection of heaven, intimacy with the Father, the glory of glory. And he did it to buy a field that he purchased with his own blood, so he could have the treasure hidden within it.

You are the treasure in the field.

You are what he desires. Is he what you desire?

FORMATION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever made a checklist of what makes you “Christian”? What is on that list?
2. In what ways has the question of how caused you to avoid what you really should be asking?
3. What are the top three cheaper desires that you find yourself wanting?
4. Read the parable of the hidden treasure again from Matthew 13:44. What do you think “selling everything you have” means for you?
5. What fear shows up inside of you when you think of losing that thing to gain the treasure?
6. Does it feel like joy to you to give it up to gain Jesus? If not, why do you think that is?

TWO

Love Moves Us from Duty to Desire

I remember sitting with my mentor in his office, which smelled of musty books, old and well read. For several years we met every Thursday at three o'clock. He was in his late sixties, a sage in my eyes. His eyebrows were thick and bushy, and when he talked about Jesus, his eyes would go big like he was seeing Jesus himself standing behind me. His prayers were never stale or pious or trite. When he prayed he was somewhere else, present to Jesus, his lover and Lord. I was happy just to breathe in the fumes of his passion for God.

At the time I was zealous and naïve, broken and frustrated. My questions often betrayed the depths of my spiritual ignorance. And my inner compass had moved from true north to due south. A spiritual journey that began with my heart responding to grace had quickly turned into a white-knuckle, willful attempt to pay Jesus back through a lifetime of duty.

I was failing at it. Three steps forward, two steps back, and after a few days I fell to a zero on a scale of one to ten. It might have been lust or greed or my temper going off. I am not sure which one it was that day, and it might have been all of the above.

It didn't take me long to veer off the path of responding to the grace given to me in Jesus and head down the path of works, striving to get God to like me by trying hard to obey him. The church had needs, the world had needs, there was a lot of sin and a lot that was broken, and I was happy to accept the job of making things—or people—right. And I was not overly religious in all of this, at least not outwardly.

But inwardly I was playing religious games as well as any Pharisee. In my mind, God had done his job, and now it was time to do mine. Without really knowing it or paying attention to it, I woke up most days hoping I could keep it together enough to get God to accept me.

My gospel was confused and I was either burning out or blowing up—and I'm not sure which it was, but I do know that it was subtle, not drastic. No grand tragedy, just a slow drift away from a relationship with Jesus driven by desire into a relationship based on duty. I ignored my heart and stuffed my desires.

So I sat with my mentor and bellowed on and on about this question and that question, all the time skirting around the central issue, which the wise man saw through quite easily.

Those large eyebrows squeezed together and his eyes

grew tight with concern. “Ohhhh, Rick,” he said, with a deep sigh, looking away from me and staring out of his window, which looked out over the parking lot from his second-story office.

We sat for quite a while, and I started to squirm. You know that feeling deep in your stomach when you have been found out? That was the feeling. I had no idea what he was going to say next; I simply knew he was greatly concerned, not over an idea or a question I had asked, but for *me*.

He finally looked back at me, leaning forward with his huge eyes now in a squint, and as a grandfather would speak to a grandson, with a great and loving concern, he simply said: “God didn’t call you to himself to use you, Rick. He called you to love you.”

And then he leaned back in his chair. “God loves you, Rick.”

I suppose I had heard that truth a few thousand times before, but this time I heard it. I really heard it.

I had left that knowledge of God’s love behind in my failed attempts to pay God back for my salvation. You can’t earn grace, which is well defined as “God’s love for us.” Yet deep down I believed that because God had died for me on the cross, I needed to make myself approvable to him. Hence I was caught up in doing my duty.

Dutiful obedience done as a response to the love of God is a good work. Willful obedience done to gain God’s approval and to earn his love is a religious work and is rooted in unbelief—and thus not a good work.

Without knowing it, we often try to justify ourselves through our good works. Though many good works are a response to God's love, not all of them are. And some of them are done without a love for God at all. So simply doing good things is not a sign of spiritual security. A work is done for God only when it is done with the right motive, and many times our motives are decidedly mixed. Certainly when we do a good work to justify ourselves before God, it isn't a good work—it's heresy.

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I'm dumbfounded when I think how easy it was to become a person driven by religious work. Even when I began to wake up to my problem, I would often justify my religiosity. "God called me to help out here," I'd think. "He really needs me to get this mission going."

The old man's words pierced my self-importance, making me disoriented and uncomfortable. If his words were true, then all my work was fruitless. All my efforts to get Jesus to love me were of no use to him since he already loved me—and had even loved me when I sinned. If Jesus already loved me, I sensed, then my religious treadmill would lead to burnout, and I would become bitter with God and his people.

In fact I see a lot of people today who are bitter with

God, the church, or other believers. Most of those disillusioned people are living out the aftermath of not trusting Jesus and of trying to earn their salvation. When they couldn't save themselves, they blamed other people.

But if God called us to his love freely by grace and apart from works, then that love changes everything, because God called us to love us, not simply to use us.

I don't know that I fully understood it all that day. I'm pretty certain I didn't. God's love is one of those deep truths that takes a lifetime to apply. The beauty of God's love is so powerful and good that it continues to disorient us. It throws us off, then catches us as we are about to fall. God's love picks us up with all our broken pieces—our raw, sinful humanity—and begins to heal us with a gentleness, severe discipline, and kindness that keeps us clinging to Jesus, and not our own ability, as our only hope.

Duty can deceive us. Many things we do in the kingdom and for the King are motivated by duty. Somewhere inside of us we are captured by the reality that Jesus is Lord and we are not, and that moves us to serve, obey, and proclaim him. But the emotion fades, the vision falters, the desire dies out, and we begin to serve out of duty. Sometimes duty is all you have, because your desire gets twisted. Desire seems weak, so you fall back on duty. The season is dry, but you don't quit. You keep going, and much of this happens because you believe Jesus is worthy as your King. You serve him out of duty. Duty as a response to love is powerful. Duty as an

attempt to earn God's love is destructive. Don't confuse the two. Duty that is a response to love is different than duty that is trying to get love to show up.

Duty might work for short periods, but it won't sustain you for the long haul. God called you to love you. Do

Duty as a response to love is powerful. Duty as an attempt to earn God's love is destructive. Don't confuse the two.

you know what to do with that? Do you know how to respond to that? In the kingdom of God, people are growing comfortable and familiar with living into the love of God.

When the love of God seems like an idea instead of a reality, I find myself drifting into a duty mind-set. When I do this, I have a big problem, because I drift out of grace and away from the desire God placed in my heart. I end up feeling like following Jesus is a burden to carry, a goal to achieve, instead of a relationship to live in.

As a dad I do a lot of things for my kids simply because I am their dad. I go to work, I buy their clothes, I coach their games, I help with homework, I take them on vacation, I teach them things, and I discipline them when they disobey. All of those things sound like duties. But they are things I do because I am a dad. Before my children were born I was not a dad. Then I became a dad. I entered into a relationship with the four most amazing kids on the planet. I love them. I do what I do out of that relationship. It can look like duty but it's something much bigger than that. They made me a

father, and I made them a son or a daughter. What I do for them is because of relationship, not duty.

Duty is dangerous. It looks good but it's deceptive. When duty runs out of steam, what will sustain you? But when your heart is growing in desire, then you will discover that God has an unlimited ability to fulfill your desire.

Love and duty are not competitors. In some ways they complement each other, but they are not equals either. Duty at its best is a response of love.

When it becomes anything else you are at risk of perverting the entirety of your spiritual life. The Pharisees were dutiful, disciplined, and capable, but duty had taken an odd turn for them, and soon relationship with the lover of Israel was no longer part

of their religious system, and their religious behaviors lost their spiritual meaning. The people Jesus frequently confronted were the most dutiful and religious people of his day. He confronted them with desire—the desire for a relationship with him.

I think of Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council who came to Jesus in the night so no one would see him (John 3). Despite his religiosity, Nicodemus became intrigued with Jesus. He was convinced God was with Jesus, and something inside Nicodemus desired God and wanted to understand God. But Jesus confused

The people Jesus frequently confronted were the most dutiful and religious people of his day. He confronted them with desire—the desire for a relationship with him.

Nicodemus with these words: “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (3:3). “Born again” is a phrase that has become synonymous with crazy religious people, but it originated with Jesus speaking to a man who was already very religious. Jesus used the phrase to blow up Nicodemus’s categories. Something only God could do would need to take place in Nicodemus’s life: a new birth.

Nicodemus was wondering what God was up to—wondering what God required of him, why he would send someone like Jesus. Jesus announces to him that you cannot enter the kingdom of God unless you are reborn. And thus, duty-bound obedience hits its first roadblock. The question Nicodemus asks is: *How can I experience birth again? I am old. I have already been born.*

I assume Nicodemus had a duty problem like many of us do, because the question he wondered about was the same question our culture is fascinated with: How?

How can a man be born when he is old?

How can these things be?

I don’t fault him of course. I would be asking the same things. Jesus blows up the categories of duty—categories that tend to work along the lines of . . .

How can I show you that I am a Christian? What do you want me to do?

How can I get into heaven?

How can I make sure you accept me?

How do I decide who’s in and who’s out?

When Jesus discards our duties as useless, then we are like people who've never been at sea who find themselves on the deck of a storm-tossed ship. We get seasick and stumble about at first, until we grow accustomed to the new way of being.

At first, like Nicodemus, we are confused, because Jesus is confronting duty with desire. He is scrambling the word *how* and turning it into *who*: How do I get into heaven? Answer: God so loved the world, he sent his Son.

In the kingdom of God we must be born of the Spirit, in the love of God, or we are not in the kingdom. God loves you, and doing your duty will never save you.

Back in my mentor's office I could feel the wheels of my duty-bound religion falling off. His gaze held God's love for me, and I sat there awkwardly, afraid to receive it. Standing face to face with my desire, I was confronted by my fear. Could I trust this love that was so excellent that nothing I could do for God would add anything to it? I wanted to believe the best news I'd ever heard, but I was afraid to trust. I was afraid to put the full weight of my heart on that reality. I don't know all the reasons why I was afraid, but I know I was.

My mentor sat in silence, waiting for my reply. In those quiet moments I began to realize what grace was: the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ. So powerful is love and grace that I could feel my heart attracted to the goodness and beauty of God. I was not trying to conjure up the

emotions. My heart was apprehending the awesome reality of God at the core of his essence. God is love.

All I had tried to will myself to do was happening within me. I was not initiating; I was responding. The difference between the two is massive. I was not making this happen. God was alive, and in the perfection of his being and the power of his love, he was changing me.

I walked out of his office exposed. My head held my self-willed duty, and my heart held the love of God like a plastic cup trying to carry the sea.

Duty had been converted to desire by the Spirit of Jesus, who poured out his love into my heart through his spirit and the loving wisdom of a godly man. As I reflect back on that day I realize I still find it easier sometimes to believe God called me to use me rather than to love me. It's safer, it's

Duty without love turns us into workers without relationship. Instead of seeing ourselves as beloved sons and daughters of a heavenly Father who adores us, we become servants of a harsh and distant King.

quantifiable, it's something I can control, but I know when I go there that I am moving away from Jesus and the kingdom, and the love of God pulls me back.

We all have the propensity to try to be God or play God. I even try to play God in my relationship with God! But I am just a sinful object of holy love. I am not even able to initiate a response to Jesus without the assistance of his Spirit.

So Jesus is effecting a deep change inside of me. Desire

for Jesus is defining me. When he manages to display his kingdom through me, that is nothing more than an overflow of his love, which I have cultivated in authentic desire. The kingdom of God is displayed not simply in the good works of God's people, but in love personally owned in the heart of his children and overflowing into the world for his glory.

Duty without love turns us into workers without relationship. Instead of seeing ourselves as beloved sons and daughters of a heavenly Father who adores us, we become servants of a harsh and distant King. We toil away down in the servants' quarters, but we never come up to the party with the fattened calf and the flowing wine.

Jesus called you to love you, not to use you. He wants you to desire *him*, not the duties you can do for him. He wants you upstairs at the banquet, feasting on his love.

FORMATION QUESTIONS

1. Is it easier for you to be wanted or needed? Why?
2. What role does duty play in your relationship to Jesus?
3. Name some ways that you try to pay God back for saving you.
4. How does it feel knowing God called you to love you, not to use you?
5. In what ways is love more powerful than duty in your relationship with Jesus?
6. What are some things in your faith that would change if you were driven by God's love for you rather than by duty?

FORMATION QUESTIONS

1. If you were to be honest about your faith right now, what would you say?
2. Can you describe a time that reinforced for you the “rule of religious living” that you shouldn’t be honest?
3. What fears do you have about being honest about your life with another person?
4. What fears do you have about being honest about your life with Jesus?
5. What would freedom look like for you if you could be honest?