

'The Animal Parables' - Questions for Reflection

To help you think through the issues raised in each of the stories below are some questions that you can use for group discussion or just to reflect on yourself.

The Mynah Bird

1. What were the things that the Mynah Bird thought he lacked, and what did he have that he didn't see?
2. Pretending to be something you are not, not being honest and open with those around you - What does it do for you? What do you lose?
3. After his initial success, what were the Mynah Bird's problems, first with his audience and then with the hunter? Are there parallels of this in your own life?
4. What do the snakes in your life say to you?
5. If things don't go right for you do you assume that God has let you down, is punishing you, or is helping you find a better way? What does this say about your view of God?
6. Do you have a voice of your own? When do you see it and what causes it to be silenced?



The Crab

1. What type of people cause you to retreat into your protective shell?
2. Have you been in a situation where you have done or said the very opposite that you wanted to? If so, what was going on there?
3. What things have caused you to harden your protective shell? How far back does it go?
4. For the Crab there was no going back. Have you had the experience where things that used to work for you stop working?
5. The New Testaments calls our habitual ways of self-protection, self-serving and selfishness our 'Flesh'. Do you recognise how your Flesh functions? How much do you see it as your personality and how much do you see it as the mould that your experiences have forced you into?
6. Even when we fully embrace the new, the old way always remains as an option. How does this play out in your own experience of effecting change in your life?



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The Dog

1. Who and what has been the Trainer in your life?
2. When you have everything under control do you too become the authoritative sheep-dog in the lives of others?
3. If you've come to faith you will probably have been told that everything has changed, but often the changes aren't as obvious as you thought they'd be. Why do you think that is?
4. Have you known times when you have failed badly? Did you hide from the Master too? When you picture him coming and looking for you, did he seem to you like the Trainer or like the kind Master?
5. Why do you think that the Master left the door locked?
6. What are the parallels between Good Dog, Bad Dog and My Dog in the Garden of Eden story? (Gen 2:15-17 & 3:1-24)



The Mackerel

1. Anger is a secondary emotion. Anger is the explosion, but something else is the detonator. What is that detonator for you?
2. For you, what happened yesterday that casts a shadow over today?
3. We will trick ourselves in all sorts of ways to avoid actually forgiving someone. What are your own techniques to avoiding forgiving?
4. Many people are very hard on themselves. Have you ever considered that you may need to forgive yourself? How could that work for you in practice?
5. The fisherman said that the hooks that had broken had done their job and that he had inflicted small wounds to heal a bigger one? Does this ring true in your life?
6. Is it an outrageous presumption that we might need to forgive God himself? How could that ever be appropriate? Could it be that you are holding God at arms-length because of unforgiveness towards Him?



The Caterpillar

1. We all have different voices speaking to our lives. How do you choose which voices to believe?
2. Addiction is a consuming madness that is our misguided attempt to meet a valid need. Given that we all need Love, Acceptance, Worth and Security to be healthy, which one do you feel short of (even if it flies in the face of the evidence)?



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3. Fear is more of a motivator than many people recognise and some fears are irrational. How many of your attitudes and actions can you track back to fears?
4. There is a work that God can do in us that is so deep that it feels like death - outwardly it looks like everything is going wrong but something unexpected and hopeful is re-forming inside. Is this something you've ever experienced?
5. To live free may be a better way, but it can feel less comfortable than the old way? What is your experience of persevering through the discomfort?
6. What does 'dying to yourself' mean to you?

The Wasp

1. Do you ever have conversations that seem to be about scoring points over the other person? Why do we do that?
2. What techniques do you use to keep others from knowing the truth of what is really in your heart?
3. Our beliefs are established from a young age. Sometimes when we put words to them they are unmasked as preposterous. Have you ever been shocked by words that have come out of your own mouth?
4. Does the community you live in feel like a family? Does it feel like an institution? What do you long for in your relationships?
5. Is there a suspicion that you have about what others think of you? What is it? Could it be a deception, a misinterpretation or even a self-fulfilling prophecy!? What is your evidence to support the feeling?
6. It can be useful to see significant events of our lives through the eyes of others. Which event of your life could you get someone else's perspective on?



The Horse

1. Each person's race is different. Do you ever envy someone else's?
2. How would you, or do you, respond when you are offered a gift so great that you could not pay the giver back?
3. Do you know what your 'old' name is? Most probably it will be to do with a belief you took on about yourself in childhood.



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4. If you really knew that the biggest concerns in life were taken care of, that the race had already been won, how differently would you live?
5. Even when the race is won, the Horse was 'made' to run. Do you have a sense of what you were made to do, that thing that lights you up, that comes easily, that just feels right?
6. The Bible is full of people who receive a new name from God and Jesus promises that all who trust in him receive a 'new' name (Rev 2:17). Have you found out what yours is? Have you ever asked?

The Frog

1. Some people love to have others follow them, whilst others prefer the security of having someone to follow. Which is your tendency?
2. Are there things that you do that look good from the outside but, in reality, they are 'all about you'?
3. The Frog loved to swim, he was made to swim, but he compromised and found himself distanced from what he and loved and was really about. Have you found yourself distanced from what you love?
4. When things go wrong in life we can be quick to blame the wrong factors. Is there a pattern to the things that go wrong in your life? Like the Frog, do you blame others or could your own flawed beliefs be the real root?
5. What does the river represent, for you, in the story?
6. After all he had learned the Frog finally let himself be carried by the current. Is there something that you have been resisting? Why do you continue to resist?

