

“Breathing Under Water: Step 6 The Chicken or the Egg”
Mark 10:35-52

We have reached Step 6, “were entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character.” So after we open our hearts and minds to see our shadow stuff and then we confess these things that we have repressed or rejected, we are supposed to get ready for God’s work in us. This could be so challenging for us. If being entirely ready is understood in the same way we get ready for things, then we are in trouble because one of our main addictions is overthinking things. Overthinking often blocks us from being able to open ourselves up to God’s healing and transformation. Here are a couple of interesting examples:

What overthinking looks like:

https://youtu.be/f_L8C13LH3Q

Overthinking: Houdini

https://youtu.be/_ICREZm9CtE

Overthinking comes from our need to control outcomes. The part about being “Entirely ready” in Step 6 could become a hindrance for many of us because our tendency is to take control, overthink things, try to earn God’s approval, or try to manufacture our own healing and happiness. After examining ourselves (Step 4) and confessing our shadow stuff (Step 5), we have to open our lives to God’s healing. The readiness and the work of God in this step may seem paradoxical. One part requires some agency on our parts, while the other part is entirely up to God. Yet, these two could work together when we learn the art of aligning ourselves with the flow of God’s grace. If we are able to be intentional about seeking God’s help and opening up to it, we would receive the gifts of healing we are seeking.

In our Bible story for today, we have two examples of people trying to open themselves to God’s vision. The first example is that of the disciples. Two of them wanted a special place right next to Jesus. The second example is that of Bartimaeus. Listen to the difference between the two examples (Read Mark 10:35-52). How do you see James and John seeking to open themselves to God? What about the blind man? What is the difference between their questions to Jesus?

James and John were seeking power as they knew it; as something they could earn and use to feel better about themselves and to find fulfillment. They wanted a reward for their work. They were following the patterns of power and control of their time. Having a special position of privilege and power was one of the ways people sought to get happiness. Their society was class-based, and people believed that those who had great positions of power were the ones who really made it in life. With a class system, most of the people were stuck in being on the bottom and there was no way of making it out of there. That is why James and John thought that it was important to ask for this kind of privilege. They needed Jesus’ help. The problem was that they were asking for the wrong thing! They

wanted that which would never satisfy or heal them. They were getting in their own way of transformation.

The second example is that of Bartimaeus who is physically seeking healing but metaphorically could give us an example of recovery of sight. The Gospel writer sandwiches the teachings of Jesus about power and suffering between two stories of recovery of sight. Jesus had already healed a blind man (Mark 8). And now we have Bartimaeus. It is interesting that Jesus used the same question that he asked the disciples to address the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" When he asked this question of his disciples, they responded by asking for worldly power, while Bartimaeus responded by asking for sight. When Jesus healed the man, he noted that it was his faith that healed him. In a way, the story is ironic because the disciples who are supposedly not blind, could not see, while the blind man was the one who was able to see Jesus for what he was. They asked for power, while the blind man asked for wholeness. He is lifted up as an example of faith, while they were rebuked for their lack of vision and understanding. This is how the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ turns our world upside down. In the kingdom of God, the values of the world are redeemed and transformed.

Here are a few lessons to learn from these two examples:

1. **Being Ready Is Not About Control or Power:** Overthinking, control, and power are about satisfying the needs and fears of our egos. True readiness is about being humble and open about our need for God.
2. **We can't manipulate God:** The disciples demanded the following, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." God knows what is best for us before we even realize it. Our work is to get our egos out of the way. That is how we take responsibility for our own shadow stuff. Nadia Bolz-Weber tells the story of a famous Evangelical Christian named Joni Erikson. Nadia writes, "She became a quadriplegic as a teenager and went on to write a lovely memoir about that story and her relationship with God. Having lost the use of her arms, she eventually learned to paint by holding a brush in her teeth...She is a lovely human being, and what she said in that interview forever changed how I view the issue of healing. Not surprisingly, a whole lot of well-meaning and enthusiastic 'prayer warriors' often offer to pray for Joni to be healed of her quadriplegia...But from her wheelchair Joni Erikson says to them, '*Could you instead please pray for the times when I cherish inflated ideas of my own importance ... the times when I fudge the truth ... the times when I manipulate my husband to get things my own way ... if you want to pray for me pray that I receive the power of resurrection to put to death the things in my life that displease God.*'"
3. **Only grace is powerful enough to heal us:** Step 6 is about learning to be in the flow of God's grace. Most of the time, we isolate ourselves from the flow. Our resentments, fears, thoughts, and patterns of behavior keep us stuck in ways that afflict us. Therefore, when it comes to Step 6, we have to open ourselves to God in a different way than our normal ways of control. We can't overthink, control, or manufacture God's grace. What we can do is learn to let it flow through us. Richard

Rohr writes (screen), “Step 6 manages to again talk paradoxically. It says that we must first fully own and admit that we have ‘defects of character,’ but then equally, step back and do nothing about it, as it were, *until we are ‘entirely ready’ to let God do the job!*...It seems we must both surrender and take responsibility...God is humble and never comes if not first invited, but God will find some clever way to *get* invited.”

We will end with a prayer by Joyce Rupp based on Mary’s response to God when she was asked to carry Christ into the world from Luke 1:38 (screen) “Then Mary said, ‘Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word.’”

“Mary was an open vessel. She heard the surprising request made to her. She struggled with uncertainty. She questioned. Listened. Responded with yes. Mary was receptive to the incredible mystery of divine love. We, too, are offered this gift, as Mary was. We are invited to be open to receive the Christ, but spiritually.” To this end I invite you to take the clay you received when you walked in and make a bowl out of it or any shape container that you would like. It will represent your life as a vessel for God’s healing and grace. (music playing: <https://youtu.be/fiyYoe678yl>)

“Imagine your spirit like the inner space of a beautiful bowl. Look inside the space of that bowl. See if it contains items that are to be given away. What gifts might you be holding that could be shared? Peace? Kindheartedness? Understanding? Tolerance? Charity? Friendliness?

Look into your inner space again. What sort of unnecessary things are there? What is taking up space that needs to be discarded in order to welcome Christ? Hard feelings toward someone? Self-absorption? Envy? Superiority? Over-attachment? Toss out anything that might be keeping the bowl from being filled with love.

See how spacious your inner self is, how much room there is for filling. Take a deep breath and breathe in the goodness of the Holy One. Fill your bowl with the beauty, healing, and power of Christ’s love.” Notice how this prayer makes you feel. Give thanks to God for this beautiful love that is always ready to bring you healing and wholeness. Amen.