

## LIFELONG LEARNERS

*We are lifelong learners committed to curiosity and growth.*

For many of us, adulthood brings with it the pressures of feeling like we need to know the answers. We easily begin to lose our ability to see the world through the lens of awe and wonder.

### A Closer Look at Curiosity and Wonder

Our faith traditions offer us a way to capture the essence of what we're talking about:

From the Christian Tradition

- **Childlike Faith:** *Approaching spirituality with confidence in God's goodness*

Or from the Zen Buddhist Tradition

- **Beginner's Mind:** *To see as though for the first time*

In thinking more about childlike faith, Jesus tells us this is an important part of accessing our spiritual selves.

#### **Matthew 18:3 (NIV)**

*And [Jesus] said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

This is an interesting invitation, but it also leaves room for interpretation. Is it possible that Jesus is telling us that having all the right answers isn't the end-goal of spiritual wellness?

*What is it about "being like children" that will help us access our spiritual selves and connection to God?*

Perhaps it helps us to return to our definitions. To be childlike is to engage the world with curiosity, wonder and awe; with confidence in God's goodness. And again in the Buddhist tradition, one might say that to have a beginner's mind is "to see as though for the first time."

With these definitions in mind, maybe "*becoming like children*" is an experience of expanding, moving from a smaller world where we "know everything," to a larger world where childlike faith opens us up to a lifetime of discovering the Divine in fresh ways.

Jesus' invitation to us in the Gospel of Matthew says it this way:

#### **Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)**

*⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."*

This is a wide-open invitation to:

- Ask
- Explore
- Wonder

Jesus seems to say: *If you have the courage to be curious, the reward on the other side of asking will be new understanding, new information, new experiences...*

And what's more, as we engage "asking" as a spiritual practice, we move beyond simply listing off prayer requests. Instead we find ourselves engaging in questions and longings towards union with God.

But just to note: This isn't for the faint of heart.

As invitational as it sounds to be a lifelong learner, it also presents some challenges:

- Saying "I don't know" can make us feel foolish.
- Exploring new ideas is time consuming
- Admitting our mistakes is difficult.
- Learning from our failures takes humility and courage

To help us consider what to do in the midst of the challenges we're likely to face, the New Testament offers us "The Parable of the Soils." Jesus' explanation of that parable goes like this:

**Mark 4:14-20 (NIV)**

*<sup>14</sup> The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."*

This is a great example of being a lifelong learner. In Jesus' explanation of the parable:

Sometimes we just can't hear it that day. For whatever reason, we don't have a Beginner's Mind. It's not working for us. That day is a bust.

Richard Rohr talks about this as well when he reminds us that the average human can only question 5% of what they believe at any given time. So sometimes, today is just not our day. Whatever thing there was to learn, it's "*quickly snatched away.*"

Other days, we learn something, and it's amazing! We're initially full of excitement, ready to make changes. Today is our day! But then no. Opposition hits and it's over. Maybe somebody shoots the idea down. Maybe we read or hear something that tells us it won't work. That day isn't our day either.

On yet another day still, once again, we were there! Some new idea, some new way of being, some new thought process - it was right there. Ours for the taking. It was going to change our lives forever. And then no. Worries, stress, unexpected challenges swoop in. And all of a sudden, we have all to do to keep our heads above water.

Whatever it was that we were on the precipice of awakening to, it's gone. Until one day, we're the perfect kind of soil. Conditions are good. And suddenly, we flourish, and there's a huge harvest in our lives.

But it took a few times - which is where compassion and loving kindness to ourselves can be really helpful.

We aren't always going to get everything right away. It takes putting ourselves in situations where we can learn and grow over and over again. It takes asking ourselves:

- *How am I engaging today?*
- *What are my failures teaching me?*
- *What can I do differently in the future?*
- *What have I learned here?*

When we engage as lifelong learners, we find we're able to let go of the tendency to judge what feels like failure, embrace the work of wonder, and embark on a lifetime of curiosity and growth.