

Asking Yourself This Question Will Only Drag You Into Despair

I had to hear it through a half-dozen other mouths before I realized it'd been in my head first, and for possibly years.

"What am I doing wrong?"

It's the mother whose child isn't sleeping, and the wife whose husband isn't emoting, the daughter whose father is still in rehab and the 25-year-old who is still in the same cubicle, with the same title, three years into her job who are all saying it.

Haven't we all said it? *When was the last time you did?*

The Wrong Question We All Ask

We brought our second two children home from Uganda, which meant we were now parents of four, and this question roiled around in my head at 11 p.m., just hours after another child's meltdown. This was the first time they'd known the safety of a Daddy's strong-arms, but my husband's arms still seemed to feel anything but safe. This was the first time they'd known family dinners and full bellies and rhythm, **yet here I was staring at their sobs and asking that question: *What am I doing wrong?***

And I remember six months into wearing wedding bands and sharing bed covers. I was six months into knowing how to use a stove for more than macaroni and cheese when the wind blew through the thin walls of our 1930's cottage at night, and it felt like the living metaphor of the tension between us. So, of course, I asked that question: *What am I doing wrong?*

We had read many marriage books, but where was there room for difficulty when you were supposed to be “young and in love”?

And later ... I gripped my handbag while round-bellied women held their girths, all of us circling up to celebrate a young friend preparing to have her first baby. They shared birth stories and I stared at the clock wondering why they had their stories, and I had only my empty womb. *What am I doing wrong?* echoed through my mind like distant footsteps down a long and sterile corridor with no end. I was barren and my friends were birthing families.

No Room for Conversation

This simple question *seems* harmless. Wouldn't we naturally want to course correct if we'd gone astray? I believe firmly in learning, at every stage of life. We're searching Craigslist for more bookshelves to hold all the books, and I'm looking down the aisle at church for more older women from whom I can glean.

Approaching forty, my life still feels like wet clay. I want to grow through and from my weaknesses.

But there's an understanding buried beneath this seemingly-neutral question that influences more of our thinking than we like to acknowledge. This one question exposes more than a sincere desire to grow; it gives a picture of how we see the God under whose care we're growing.

We speak of God as a shepherd to us who are weak and leaning and learning to trust—a Father—and yet we live under the weighty burden of getting it all right. It can leave us feeling mostly helpless and stuck and seemingly destined to mess it all up.

What am I doing wrong? This question we mutter under our breath or moan to our girlfriends—the one that dances in our

heads when a day goes awry or our children are squirrely or our career track gets derailed—leaves us alone and seeing God as distant and disappointed, merely here to coach us how to “get it right, already” so that our lives run smoothly.

It ends the conversation.

With this question, there is no conversation.

Formulas

What am I doing wrong comes from cloudy-read: false-thinking about who God is according to His Word and eliminates the thick and rich exchange with God that happens when we come, needy, and expect Him to Father us. Gently.

What am I doing wrong puts all the weight on the “right way”—that this nebulous, yet singular, “right” way to parent and to love our spouse and to build a home and to [fill in your blank] will somehow meet the needs of the deepest parts of us that are asking this question, that are feeling terribly weak and vulnerable and as if we’re forever failing.

It implies a vending machine answer from a stoic God and a life whose trajectory is best fulfilled by formula and a lack of failure.

What am I doing wrong exposes what we truly think about God.

God Is...

Can I tell you (can I tell me): ***He’s so different in His Word than what we often think in the deepest parts of us.***

He’s tender, leading us with the understanding of our weak flesh but ever in the one-right-way, which is to Himself. He doesn’t scold when we cry to Him at the end of a hard day, barking answers in reply. He moves near. In. God’s ready arms are strong. They’re safe enough for our biggest meltdown and

ready to lift and hold us through our very next step.

One “false move” isn’t the end of you, it’s His opportunity to invite you into the hidden, more-raw, conversation with Him that you’ve been craving.

Perhaps take a breather today and note when the last time was that you said “what am I doing wrong” and where are the places in your life that you’re asking this.

Instead, make a choice to let these places be the pause-and-climb-into-His-lap opportunities when you open His Word* for yourself and find the real truth about the Him, 'cause we all know our hearts can sometimes lie to us about who He is.

Instead let this be the place where He can gently Father you, teach you, lead you.

And that’s doing it right.

***For Your Continued Pursuit (dig a little deeper, both in your heart and in His Word): 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 | Psalm 34:18 | Psalm 119:28, 37 | Psalm 18:16-18, 28-30 | Matthew 9:9-13 {eoa}**

Sara is a wife to Nate and a mother of five whose arms stretched wide across the expanse between the United States and Africa. After almost a decade of Christian life she was introduced to pain and perplexity and, ultimately, intimacy with Jesus. God met her and moved her when life stopped working for her. And out of the overflow of this perplexity, came her writing, both on her blog and in her book, Every Bitter Thing Is Sweet, released October 2014 via Zondervan.

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