



Sermon Discussion Questions

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Series: Scenic Overlook
Week 6: Jordan River

1. ICE BREAKER: The Jordan River is a significant place across the Old Testament and the New Testament, for generations of Israelites. Is there a specific place that has been significant in your family history? What is it and why?
2. Read our Scripture for this week, Matthew 3:1-17:

¹In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

*"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"*

⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

What stands out to you as you read these verses today? What do you learn about God in this Scripture? Share any questions or confusion you have.

3. Read Matthew 3:15 in the Message version: "*But Jesus insisted. "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism." So John did it.*"

Discuss why John did not want to baptize Jesus. Why do you think that Jesus insisted on being baptized by John? Describe how you understand the idea that God's work across the centuries is "coming together" in this moment.

4. Identity is defined by the American Psychological Association as, "an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal

characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles.”

Define identity in your own words. How would you answer the question “Who are you?” Why do you think identity is a hot topic in culture right now?

5. Our true identities can be easily warped by two forces: who we want to be, and who others want us to be. All of us have to negotiate understanding ourselves amidst these two influences.

Discuss which of these ‘distortions’ you are more prone to, and why. How have these two forces challenged your identity across your life?

6. Gen Z and younger generations today face an especially difficult landscape for developing their own identity, largely because of access to technology and experiencing adolescence on social media.

How are you, as an adult, influenced by social media, or by constant access to technology? What, if anything, have you done to try and temper this influence in your life? If you are a parent of a Gen Z member, have you seen this to be true? Why or why not?

7. God audibly says the words, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased” on two separate occasions in the New Testament - once, here, at Jesus’ baptism, and once at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5).

God’s audible voice is only recorded three times in the New Testament. Why do you think these words are so important that He says them twice? Is it easy or hard for you to believe that this is true for you, too? That you are also a son or daughter of God?

8. Henri Nouwen writes, *“Your true identity is as a child of God. This is the identity you have to accept. Once you have claimed it and settled in it, you can live in a world that gives you much joy as well as pain. You can receive the praise as well as the blame that comes to you as an opportunity for strengthening your basic identity, because the identity that makes you free is anchored beyond all human praise and blame. You belong to God, and it is as a child of God that you are sent into the world.”*

Discuss this quote. How can we live in a way that our identity as a child of God is foremost in our lives? Why must this identity be our foundation? How does this affect the way that we live, and that we experience the joys and challenges of life?

9. Our identity is always challenged - both by other people, and by Satan. Reread Matthew 4:3.

How does Satan attack Jesus' identity in the wilderness? How have you experienced your identity challenged - either by people or by the enemy? What do you do when you realize you are experiencing this?

10. PRACTICE: Imaginative prayer is a way of praying that involves the mind, heart, and can stir up thoughts and emotions. It's a way of meeting God in a different way that we often do through our logical mind. We will practice this type of prayer together across this series. It may feel awkward at first, but trust God to show up in it.

Have someone in the group put on some contemplative music (we recommend *Soaking in His Presence*) and set a timer for 5 minutes.

Imagine standing at the "scenic overlook" of the Jordan River. Imagine wading out in the water toward John the Baptist. Imagine watching Jesus as He is baptized, and hearing God's words of declaration over Him. Now imagine God declaring those words over YOU.

What is God saying to you? What do you learn about God by imagining yourself in this place?

Share your experience with your group.