

**Pastor Jonna Bohigian**  
**Time to Leave the Nest**  
Luke 24:44 – 53

“You are spiritually fat,” she said. We all sat in shocked silence. “You come to chapel three times a week, hear powerful messages, and then go back to your dorms not to do anything about it. It’s like eating and not exercising.” She may have even thrown in the term “spiritual glutton,” for good measure.

I can’t remember anything else about her chapel message nor can I remember who gave that talk, but I do remember her phrase “spiritually fat.” Her shocking statement could cause someone to feel defensive, but I don’t remember feeling defensive; I remember *resonating* with what she said. I was in this Christian bubble of college and we were absorbing the goods from our professors and chapels, but not doing much with what we were receiving. She was right; we were guilty. We were getting spiritually fat.

It’s likely that “spiritually fat” is far from how you currently feel. Now, you feel more spiritually *hungry* than ever before. You *crave* that spiritual nourishment, that spiritual meat. You desire the presence of God now, more than ever before. You miss the ability to naturally rub shoulders with other Christians and to receive encouragement from them. It’s difficult to discipline yourself and your family to sit on the couch every Sunday morning and to have yet another hour of screen time.

In addition to spiritual hunger, your emotional hunger is high. You feel exhausted most of the time and *you* would like to be cared for, for a change. You are asked to parent more; to work more with less resources; to find work in this slumped economy; you have to be disciplined in every *single* aspect of your life

(such as when to study, when to go to school, when to wake up each morning); if you are an extrovert, you miss *people* – the energy they give you, the pep in your step you feel after those gatherings; and if you're an introvert, you're *still* drained, even working from home (which you love), because your *family* won't leave you alone.

Yet maybe, despite your current hunger, a question lingers in your mind regarding your spiritual fatness or fitness. When was the last time you went beyond your comfort zone in a conversation with someone regarding faith? When was the last time you confessed your sin to another person? When was the last time you engaged in worship, not to check something off the list or to critique the content, but to give to God your highest praise, your fullest thanksgiving? When was the last time you gave to someone, not because they deserved it, but simply because you desired to bless them? When you think about your spiritual life, do the words “passive” or “consumer,” come to mind?

I hope you know that with these questions, I do not ask them with the confidence that I have perfectly answered each one of these questions. I, just as you, have plenty of room to grow. No matter *how* old I am and no matter *how* long you have been a Christian, we *all* have room to grow, and we are doing it together.

Frankly, I am cautious to offer a challenge during this time. I recognize, and I feel, how sensitive and exhausting this time is. It's like going on a run that you thought was a sprint but turned into a marathon, and you don't know *where* the finish line is. We are in a liminal space where life is not what it once was nor do we

know what it *will* be. We are in the midst of change, and we wish we could control the outcome, but we simply *can't*.

We are in a situation not terribly dissimilar from the disciples' in Luke 24. Their best friend would be physically distanced from them and would return at some unknown time. They were told that things would change, but many of the particulars were hazy. They were told that soon, they would have more work than ever before. They were told that now, they were not to *go* anywhere or really *do* anything. They were to wait. Sound familiar?

Jesus had risen from the dead, but his disciples didn't understand what it meant. He had spoken of the necessity of his death and resurrection for some time, but they hadn't understood it. So, he interpreted his death and resurrection for them, and interpreted how he fulfilled Scripture. He told them that they would receive power from on high and that "repentance and forgiveness of sins [would] be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47).

Jerusalem was, and is, the epicenter of the Jewish faith. Jerusalem was the place people flooded, to offer sacrifices, to be made right with God, and to celebrate religious feasts like Pentecost and Passover. Jerusalem was the holy city where the temple resided, the place *God* resided.

But the fascinating, and for many, the *scandalous* thing, was that Jesus claimed that God no longer resided in the temple. He claimed that God had come *to them*. He claimed that *he* was God. He was God in the flesh – living, breathing, and walking among them. He forgave their sins, so offering sacrifices for sins at the temple would do them no good. He claimed, in fact, that the temple would be

destroyed. And Jesus had no heartburn about it. The temple would be destroyed, and Jesus instructed his disciples to wait until they had received power from on high, to go into *all* the world.

Everything that had been important to the disciples would change. Their beloved friend would leave them, the temple would be destroyed, they would have to disperse, and they had a job to do. They were to be witnesses to all nations of what Jesus had done.

They had quite the task in front of them. They had no guarantee of *how* they would successfully complete their mission, nor *if* they would survive. They were promised instead, that they would be brought to court and that they would have to pick up their cross and follow the way of Jesus. They did not have a task for the faint of heart; theirs was no cozy life of gathering at a building once a week to worship. They were called to wait until they had received power from the Holy Spirit, and then go.

The suspense is high. When will the Holy Spirit come, and how? What will their lives look like? Will they be faithful to their calling? Will they be successful? Will they see one another again? Tune in next week to hear more!

In the midst of the suspense, Jesus blesses them. He commissions them for ministry, much like *he* was. Do you remember how Jesus was commissioned? Before he began his ministry, Jesus was baptized. The heavens were parted, the Holy Spirit descended onto him, and a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22b).

We don't know the words Jesus uses to bless his disciples, but perhaps his words are an echo of the blessing *he* received. *You are my disciples, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*

Jesus ascends into heaven, they worship him, and they return to Jerusalem with great joy. They stay at the temple, blessing God (Lk 24:52 – 53).

Jesus was with them for three years, but his purpose was something much greater than those three years. His purpose was to bring the Kingdom of God to the *whole* earth, and to one day return in *all* his glory, to be with us in perfect unity. His was a task that would go beyond him. His was a task that would require his disciples. It was time for them for them to leave the nest and fly.

Many of you know our Office Administrator, Beth Tkacheff. Beth is the glue that holds this place together, and she knows *everything*. If you ever have a question, don't ask a pastor; ask Beth. Beth told me that while she was raising her kids, her goal was to make herself as a mom obsolete. "The goal of raising kids is to make them independent adults," she says.

Beth's comment reminds me of a mama bird pushing her birds out of the nest so that they fly. The purpose of birds is not to stay in the nest, cozy and protected by the mama bird. Their purpose is to be *out there*, to spread their wings and fly, to grow, to learn, to have their own families, to play their particular role in the ecosystem, to remind people like me not to take life so seriously. Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matt 6:26 – 27).

Jesus' disciples' purpose was not to stay in the nest; their purpose was to *go*. They were to go and spread the good news of Jesus, to make disciples of *all nations*, so that the Kingdom of God would come to *all* the earth.

The disciples' purpose is now *our* purpose. We have the same commission, to make disciples of *all nations*. We will often complain that we don't know enough, we still have doubts, we aren't convincing enough, we don't have our lives together enough. We would rather stay in the nest a *lot* longer before being forced out into the world to have to say anything. We allow our fears to control us, not recognizing that what God has already given to us *is* enough.

In 2018 and 2019, the Barna Group conducted nationally representative research among nearly 2,000 non-Christians. They asked questions regarding what they would *desire* in a spiritual conversation partner, along with questions of their *experience*. They found that *top quality* that non-Christians desired in a spiritual conversation partner was someone who listened without judgment. 62% of participants said that they would like to have a spiritual conversation with someone who listened without judgment. Yet, only 34% said that this was their experience. The next quality was a desire for someone who did not force a conclusion, yet only 26% experienced this among Christians they knew. The next top qualities were "allows others to draw their own conclusions" and "confident in sharing their own perspective." Ranked *second-to-last* was "good at debating topics." The *top quality* a non-Christian desired in a spiritual conversation partner was someone who "listens without judgment."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/non-christians-faith-conversations/>

Listening without judgment is a quality of *humility* and *compassion* for the other. Listening without judgment is a quality gained when you recognize that you have been extended *incredible grace* when you've screwed up royally. And let's be honest – it's happened *a lot*. Henri Nouwen writes that it is the “possibility for each of us to forgive our brothers and sisters, because forgiveness is only real for those who have discovered the weakness of their friends and the sins of their enemies in their own hearts, and are willing to call each human being their sister and brother.”<sup>2</sup> It comes from knowing *deep within your bones* that you are forgiven and you are loved. Listening without judgment is not something that can be gained by staying in the nest. It's a quality that is gained by taking risks and recognizing that you don't have it all together; you need help.

That is the incredible thing about our Christian faith. It is not have a faith that says that you need to have it all together, that you need to attain perfection, that you need to be strong, or that you need to have all the answers. It is not a faith that is dependent on us. It is a faith in the One who loves you, who created you, who became weak to save you, and who gives you the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purposes in your life.

If you don't yet know this God, I invite you to find out more. Speak with a Christian that you know and trust. Click on the “prayer request” button on your screen (you will see that button on both our “live” and “on-demand” worship services), and one of our church staff will gladly pray for you.

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 46.

As Jesus blessed his disciples in their commissioning, I invite you to receive this blessing: You are God's son. You are God's daughter, whom He loves. With you He is well pleased. It's time to leave the nest and fly. You were created for it. Amen.