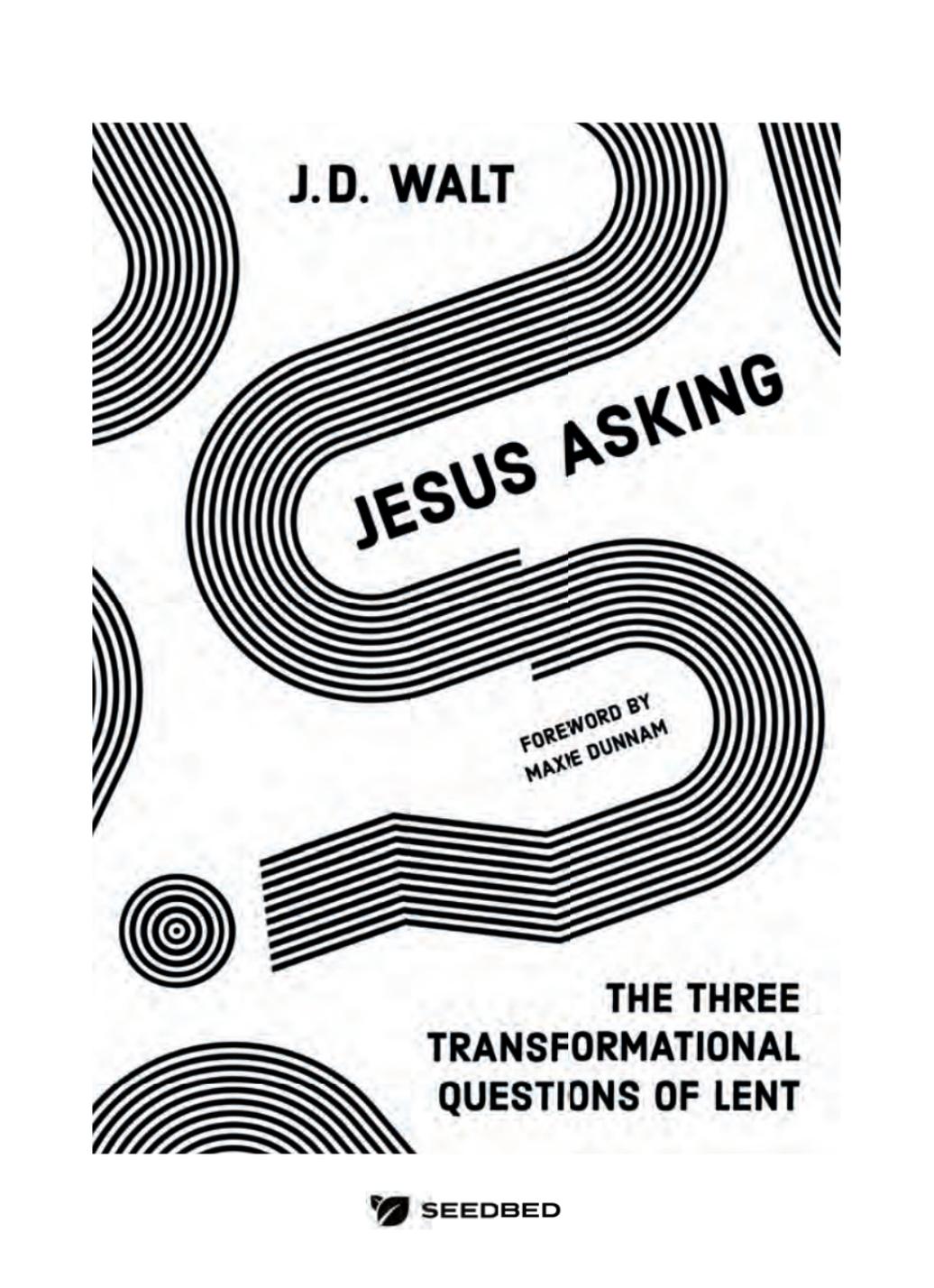
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J. D. WALT

JESUS ASKING

**FOREWORD BY
MAXIE DUNNAM**

**THE THREE
TRANSFORMATIONAL
QUESTIONS OF LENT**



J.D. WALT

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FOREWORD BY
MAXIE DUNNAM

**THE THREE
TRANSFORMATIONAL
QUESTIONS OF LENT**

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Printed in the United States of America

*Cover design by Faceout Studio, Kate Gendruschke
Page design and layout by PerfectType, Nashville, Tennessee*

Walt, J. D. (John David)

Jesus asking : the three transformational questions of Lent / J.D. Walt Jr. – Franklin, Tennessee : Seedbed Publishing, ©2026.

pages ; cm.

ISBN 9798888002032 (paperback)
ISBN 9798888002063 (DVD)
ISBN 9798888002049 (ePub)
ISBN 9798888002056 (uPDF)
OCLC 1535932991

1. Lent--Devotional literature. 2. Lent--Prayers and devotions.
3. Lent--Meditations. 4. Spiritual exercises 5. Devotional calendars I. Title.

BV85.W3374 2026

242/.3

2025932991

SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Franklin, Tennessee
Seedbed.com

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An Invitation to Follow Jesus

This resource comes with an invitation.

The invitation is as simple as it is comprehensive. It is not an invitation to commit your life to this or that cause or to join an organization or to purchase another book. The invitation is this: to wake up to the life you always hoped was possible and the reason you were put on planet Earth.

It begins with following Jesus Christ. In case you are unaware, Jesus was born in the first century BC into a poor family from Nazareth, a small village located in what is modern-day Israel. While his birth was associated with extraordinary phenomena, we know little about his childhood. At approximately thirty years of age, Jesus began a public mission of preaching, teaching, and healing throughout the region known as Galilee. His mission was characterized by miraculous signs and wonders; extravagant care of the poor and marginalized; and multiple

unconventional claims about his own identity and purpose. In short, he claimed to be the incarnate Son of God with the mission and power to save people from sin, deliver them from death, and bring them into the now and eternal kingdom of God—on earth as it is in heaven.

In the spring of his thirty-third year, during the Jewish Passover celebration, Jesus was arrested by the religious authorities, put on trial in the middle of the night, and at their urging, sentenced to death by a Roman governor. On the day known to history as Good Friday, Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. On the following Sunday, according to multiple eyewitness accounts, he was physically raised from the dead. He appeared to hundreds of people, taught his disciples, and prepared for what was to come.

Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily into the heavens where, according to the Bible, he sits at the right hand of God, as the Lord of heaven and earth. Ten days after his ascension, in a gathering of 120 people on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish day of celebration, something truly extraordinary happened. A loud and powerful wind swept over the people gathered. Pillars of what appeared to be fire descended upon the followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, the presence and power of God, filled the people, and the church was born. After this, the followers of Jesus went forth and began to do the very things Jesus

Foreword

I first met John David Walt back in 1994. I remember it because I had just been called to become the fifth president of Asbury Theological Seminary. In my first days in office, I received a handwritten letter from J. D. congratulating me on becoming the president and letting me know he would be in my first incoming class of students the following month. I, of course, wrote him back, and there began one of the beautiful friendships of my and my wife's life—now spanning more than thirty years.

Can I tell you about my second encounter with my then-new friend? I got another letter from him through the seminary post office. In the letter, he was applying to become the groundskeeper for Rose Hill, the seminary's celebrated home for its president. Soon he was riding a lawnmower in the expansive yard; raking the fallen leaves from hundreds of trees; helping my wife, Jerry, with flower

gardening and all manner of horticultural pursuits; and I'll save the fishpond debacle story for another day. Yes, I take joy in remembering that J. D. Walt was my first yardman.

Early on, he approached me and asked if I would be willing to mentor him along the way in what it meant to be a minister of the gospel. Early in that journey, I introduced John David to what I considered the most important book I had written to date. It is entitled *Alive in Christ: The Dynamic Process of Spiritual Formation*. To this day, I consider it the book of my heart and core theology. I wrote it during my tenure as the world editor of the Upper Room. I'm hoping my publisher, Seedbed, will soon re-release it. If I had to summarize the book with a brief excerpt, this would be the one:

The primary dynamic of the Christian life is abiding in Christ. Spiritual formation is “the dynamic process of receiving through faith and appropriating through commitment, discipline, and action, the living Christ into our lives to the end that our life will conform to and manifest the reality of Christ’s presence in the world.” (*Alive in Christ*, 26)

As we worked and walked and talked our way through this book and its accompanying workbook, J. D. took to it like a duck to water, as I had heard said in my growing-up

Ash Wednesday, Day 1

Welcome to the Forty Days of Lent

CONSECRATE

*Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you. (Eph. 5:14)*

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

Jesus, we belong to you.

Praying in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, amen.

READ

Galatians 4:4–5 NASB

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons and daughters.

CONSIDER

Lent. The word comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, *lencten*, which means “lengthen.” It is a word that signifies springtime—when the days begin to lengthen. Seems pretty harmless and benign. It’s spring again. Big deal, right? It’s another lap around the sun, another walk through the cycle of seasons—winter, spring, summer, and fall. They come like clockwork, don’t they? In fact, they *are* clockwork. This is how time moves. The Bible calls this kind of time *chronos*, the Greek root found in our English word *chronological*. Winter. Spring. Summer. Fall.

The Bible also speaks of another kind of time: *kairos*. In short, *kairos* time is God time, which is not so much about time as it is about God. In fact, God dwells outside time in the realm of eternity. And this is precisely the amazing thing about God time. God time is the reality that happens when eternity breaks into time. This, of course, is the story of Jesus.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons and daughters.

Chronos time is measured by seasons and kept on a calendar. Kairos time is marked by a story and kept by a community. That means the most important timepiece we have is not a calendar or a clock but the Bible—the revealed Word of God.

We don't need more shifting seasons; we need more movement. We don't need more religion; we need more life. We don't need more activity; we need more awakening. We don't need more answers; we actually need more questions.

Here is the meaning of the movement of Lent. In the thirty-third spring of the first millennium, Jesus of Nazareth began a descent from the Mount of Transfiguration deep into the Valley of the Cross, where he would die a death by crucifixion and rise from the dead as the ultimate act of love to reconcile the lost human race to the God who created us.

Beginning today—Ash Wednesday—Lent is a journey of forty days ending on Holy Saturday and culminating with Easter Sunday. The six intervening Sundays do not count in the forty days. Since the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead—on Easter Sunday—Sundays have been for feasting, never fasting.

Lent is an invitation to break the predictable pace of another trip around the sun and to get in step with the movement of the story of Jesus. It is an opportunity to wake up to the reality of the real, true, and living God in real, true, and living time. It's why I always like to say: *Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!*

One final note as we embark. This is not a book of answers, but one of questions. It will unfold as a journey of questions. Early on we will touch on what I call “the question of all questions.” It will take a few weeks of walking together, but we will arrive at what I call “the three transformational questions.” And be warned, they are deep questions, and the depth at which you are willing to engage them will determine the depth of growth you can expect on the other side. Now, one final question on this first day of the journey: Are you ready?

PRAY

Our Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus. Lord Jesus, we step into these forty days of Lent eager to follow you, to walk in your ways, to discover your will, and to awaken to new life in you. Come, Holy Spirit! Where you

lead us, we will follow. We are ready. Praying in Jesus's name, amen.

JOURNAL

What are your intentions as we walk into these forty days of Lent? What are your hopes? What are your questions?

Thursday, Day 2

On Pulling the Fire Alarm in Church

CONSECRATE

*Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you. (Eph. 5:14)*

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

Jesus, we belong to you.

Praying in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, amen.

READ**Joel 2:1 NASB**

*Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
For the day of the LORD is coming;
Indeed, it is near.*

CONSIDER

Years ago I served as dean of the chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary. I often did confounding things. One I always wanted to do but never did was to pull the fire alarm in the chapel during a worship service. I always wanted to do it on Ash Wednesday, the solemn assembly that opens the door into the movement of Lent.

“Why?” you ask? Because that’s what the prophet is doing in today’s text, which is the traditional, classic text for the opening of Lent. Didn’t he say “sound an alarm”?

*Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!*

I once had a friend, Ricky, who was straight out of the Old Testament—a spitfire prophet type. He told me how he walked up to a lost and broken friend’s door one day and greeted him with these words, “Bobby, if I was driving by and your house was on fire, would you want me to stop and tell you?”

The friend said, “Of course, I would!”

Ricky then said, “Well, Bobby, your house is on fire!” It was Ricky’s way of pulling the fire alarm.

Friends, I’m no doomsday prophet, but I am a bit of a truth teller. Have you looked around lately? Our house is on fire. I don’t need to rehearse the story with you. And isn’t that part of the problem? Like the proverbial frog in the kettle, we’ve slowly accepted the disastrous status quo all around us. We feel powerless to effect meaningful change, and we often retreat into the enclaves of resistance we call churches or, worse, political parties. Plenty of people are pulling the fire alarm and pointing at all the problems *out there*.

But that won’t fix the problem. We must pull the fire alarm *in here*. Awakening starts with me. How might I pull the fire alarm in my own heart? Here’s how the prophet Joel says to do it:

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping, and mourning;
And tear your heart and not merely your
garments.”

Now return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in mercy
And relenting of catastrophe. (Joel 2:12–13 NASB)

Those seven words show us how to break the glass: “Return to Me with all your heart.”

PRAY

Our Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus. Lord Jesus, we’re sorry for locating the problem out there and absolving ourselves of any real responsibility. We want to confess, the problem is in here, in our hearts. We are part of the problem. We know it even if we do not feel it. And we can’t fix it. It’s why we want to return to you with all our hearts. Thank you for accepting them in broken pieces. Come, Holy Spirit! Praying in Jesus’s name, amen.

JOURNAL

What are some of the broken pieces of your heart? What keeps you from simply and humbly offering them back to Jesus? Are you letting a part of your broken heart keep you from returning to him with *all* your heart?

Friday, Day 3

I Have Cancer and You Do Too

CONSECRATE

*Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you. (Eph. 5:14)*

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

Jesus, we belong to you.

Praying in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, amen.

READ**Joel 2:12–13 NASB**

*“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping, and mourning;
And tear your heart and not merely your garments.”
Now return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in mercy
And relenting of catastrophe.*

CONSIDER

I always wanted to break the glass and pull the fire alarm in the chapel on Ash Wednesday, but I never did. I sort of did it once. And I never really recovered from the debacle it unleashed.

I stood up before the chapel, and as I began my message, I said I had some bad news I needed to share first. “I’m sad to tell you,” I said, “but I have recently learned that I have cancer.” There were gasps and even a shriek, and some began to cry. I then tried to qualify my declaration by saying that I didn’t have cancer like they thought. I had a different sort of cancer, and they had it too. I told them that we all have sin cancer. And, yes, it is terminal.

Isn’t that the point of Ash Wednesday? We get the sign of the cross made on our foreheads in black ashes. We

hear the words spoken straight into our souls: “From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the gospel.”

That’s more than a message that none of us is getting out of here alive. It’s worse than that. We are already dead. We have sin cancer, and it’s terminal. We’ve had it from birth.

However, there is really good news. That’s what *gospel* means: good news. The gospel is that there is a cure, and it has a 100-percent cure rate. The cure has a name: Jesus. We will get into how the cure works in the coming days, but for now you just need to know that Jesus cures sin cancer—and not just a little bit. It’s not only an after-you-die-you-will-go-to-heaven cure. That’s true, but the cure actually touches every aspect of your life right here and now. And what is the word that invites this transformational cure? It is *repent*, and it means exactly what the Scripture text says today:

“Return to Me with all your heart.”

And what about *believe*, the other command from our Ash Wednesday liturgy? *Believe* doesn’t mean just accept it. *Believe* means lean in with your whole weight.

Do you remember what the name *Jesus* means? It means “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

It means 100-percent cure.

PRAY

Our Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus. Lord Jesus, the song is right. There is just something about your name. You are the cure for sin cancer. And as much as we hate to admit it, we have it. So instead of admitting it, we will confess it. We are sinners. We have sin cancer. We need you, Jesus, to cure us. But we want you to know this, Jesus: We want you. Come, Holy Spirit. Praying in Jesus's name, amen.

JOURNAL

Are you aware that you have a bigger problem than your pesky sins, which are symptoms? Are you aware of the sin-cancer tumor that is causing those symptoms? How does this metaphor help you better understand Jesus as the cure for our condition? And how does this differ from simply dealing with the symptoms of the sickness?

Saturday, Day 4

On Metastatic Sin Cancer

CONSECRATE

*Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you. (Eph. 5:14)*

Jesus, I belong to you.

I lift up my heart to you.

I set my mind on you.

I fix my eyes on you.

I offer my body to you as a living sacrifice.

Jesus, we belong to you.

Praying in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, amen.

READ

Genesis 1:27

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

CONSIDER

The Bible tells us that when God first created human beings, he made us in his very image. “Made in God’s image” is a phrase bandied about so much in Christian circles it has become cliché. This truth is actually mind-blowing. To bear the image of your Creator means when other people see you, they see your Creator.

Clearly something went wrong somewhere because, Toto, we aren’t living in that Kansas anymore. What went wrong is both simple and complex. Our ancient forebears, the original humans—the prototypes—turned against God. They wanted to be their own gods. This broke the bonded relationship and resulted not in the loss of God’s image but in the loss of God’s presence with us, effectively rendering the image of God broken and bankrupt.

To continue our cancer metaphor: Think of the image of God as a super internal (albeit unseen) organ of sorts—not just existing at the very core of our being but running throughout our whole body and connected with every other system and organ in our body. Think of this super

organ as the system that infuses and profuses divine DNA (a.k.a. the eternal life) throughout our bodies. And it doesn't just course through our bodies, it also connects our beings and bodies together in a supernaturally extraordinary way. The image of God is the touchpoint and interface where we know and experience abiding union with God and with others created in God's image.

When our ancient forebears willfully broke the covenantal relationship with God and rebelliously hid and turned against one another and blamed each other for their failure, thereby claiming victimhood, the image of God was not removed but rendered null and inoperable. It was like a cancer entered our genetic code and decimated the image of God from the inside out. Eternal life was gone. Not only was our quality of life greatly diminished, but our quantity of life was severely limited. With sin came death.

What's important to understand is that we didn't start the fire. It was already burning when we got here. It seems unfair, and perhaps it is, but those are the simple facts. Let's be clear. We didn't initially cause the problem. However, we were born with the problem. And, yes, we have contributed to it in such a way that it is immaterial that it didn't actually begin with us.

Let's give Paul the last word on this today: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and

death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned—” (Rom. 5:12 NASB).

That’s the biblical definition of metastatic sin cancer. And I know—I can’t let that hanging dash hang. So now to the gospel, which is the good news of the cure: “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (v. 19 NASB).

PRAY

Our Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus. Lord Jesus, we know we didn’t cause the problem, but we now have the problem of sin and death, and therefore, we are part of the problem. We are sorry for the ways we have misunderstood this and responded poorly as a result. We want your image to be fully restored in us so we might live life to the fullest for your glory, for others’ gain, and for our good. Come, Holy Spirit, and teach and train us in the cure of this gospel. Praying in Jesus’s name, amen.

JOURNAL

What do you make of this way of imagining the image of God in us? Does it resonate? Where do you struggle with or push back against it? What are the implications of it?

JESUS ASKED A LOT OF QUESTIONS. HE STILL DOES.

The world we live in places a premium on answers. Jesus takes a different approach. He's all about the questions. Did you know Jesus asked others upward of three hundred questions in the Gospels? He was asked somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred eighty questions by others. Interestingly, he only directly answered three of those questions.

What if we pressed pause for a minute on our need for more answers? And what if we upped our game on our quest to find better questions? And isn't this interesting—the connection between *quest* and *question*?

That is the quest of this book. Over the forty days of the season of Lent—in his signature style—J. D. Walt weaves together Scripture and stories to enrich our journey to the cross with Jesus. Starting with what he calls the Question of All Questions—Who do you say that I am?, J. D. unfolds the compelling story of how his mentor taught him three transformational questions. Simple and profound, these questions will awaken your faith and deepen your walk with Jesus.

Whether you are looking for a contemplative personal journey or a shared way with others—even your whole church—*Jesus Asking* will train you in the art of the question and lead you to the answers only God can reveal.

Renowned Bible teacher and prolific author, **JOHN DAVID [J. D.] WALT** is the former dean of chapel of Asbury Theological Seminary and the founder and sower in chief of Seedbed. Seedbed exists to gather, connect, and resource the people of God to sow for a great awakening. He serves as pastor of the Gillett Methodist Church in Gillett, Arkansas.



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ISBN 979-8-88800-203-2

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