

THE SEVEN PRIMAL QUESTIONS

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The Seven Primal Questions

**TAKE CONTROL OF THE HIDDEN
FORCES THAT DRIVE YOU**

Mike Foster
PRIMAL QUESTION RESOURCES

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Take the FREE Primal Question Assessment

Discover your Primal Question and understand the hidden forces that drive you. Visit PrimalQuestion.com or scan the QR code below.



Go Deeper Breakout

**The average child asks
250 questions a day.
The average adult asks
20. As a child, you were
hungry for answers—
even if they were bad
answers.**

PREFACE

I knew I shouldn't have gotten in his car. But I did, and it was a horrible mistake.

Kevin was an old friend of mine. He'd just bought the most expensive, fully loaded Tesla available. He drove over to my house to show it to me.

"Hop in," Kevin said. "I want to show you something."

I opened the door and sat in the front seat. It was stunning. Electronics everywhere. A massive screen in the center console looked like it could launch a rocket. Little did I know, that's what it was about to do: launch us.

“Now check this out,” he said with a giddiness no grown man should have. “This is called ‘Ludicrous Mode.’ It makes the car do crazy stuff. You wanna see?”

“Not really,” I responded. But I agreed because of Kevin’s excitement.

“Alright. Hold on,” he said. “I’m gonna floor it so you can get the full experience.”

He hit the accelerator. My body lurched backward, pinning me to the seat. We accelerated with a force I had never felt before. It was like an F-18 launching off the deck of an aircraft carrier. It! Was! Ludicrous!

Some people love this kind of thrill. But I went into panic mode. I couldn’t breathe. Gallons of adrenaline and cortisol dumped into my body. I felt like I had been sucker punched by Mike Tyson. Every cell in my body screamed, “Get out!” Survival was my only goal. I yelled, “Kevin, stop! Please stop!” He chuckled and kept it floored.

The car rocketed down the street. My head pounded. My chest heaved. The skin on my neck and cheeks flapping like a flag

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A Tesla operating in Ludicrous Mode can accelerate to 100 MPH in four seconds. That's twice as fast as Disney's California Screamin' roller coaster.

in a hurricane. Every muscle in my body contracted into a tight knot.

“Kevin! I’m begging you, stop this car NOW! I think I’m going to vomit!”

I must have looked totally unhinged because he finally let up. Or maybe he just didn’t want smelly vomit in his new Tesla. Either way, we drove home at “normal” speed. My head spun. My body felt hot and numb. I staggered into my house and collapsed.

The word that best describes my response to Kevin’s Tesla is this: primal.

What happened in that car hit the deepest and most central part of me. It lit me up on every level: my mind, my body chemistry, my central nervous system, my emotions. Normal Mike ejected out of the car and survivalist caveman Mike exploded onto the scene. I was no longer in control of myself. Something more primitive took over. This is what I want us to talk about.

HELPFUL TERMS TO KNOW

Primal Question: One of a set of core questions that subconsciously drive your choices, actions, and triggers. The question contains clarity into your vulnerabilities and opportunities in relationship with yourself and others. Thriving in life requires you to unhook from the various answers to your Primal Question and live your Primal Truth statement.

The Scramble: The emotional struggle that takes place when your Primal Question is answered with a no or a maybe. During the scramble, you often choose compromising actions and behaviors to force the answer back to a yes.

Primal Truth: When you take your Primal Question and turn it into a statement of truth instead of a question. It calls upon your healthy, true self to lead your life.

Primal Gift: The relational superpower that you have built over the years by interacting with your own Primal Question. It is a unique strength that makes you world class in your friendships, career, and marriage.

Self-Leadership: The act of taking control of your inner programming. You become the CEO of your life by creating a healthy relationship with your emotions, needs, and Primal Gift. This is the life-changing outcome of understanding how your Primal Question works.

Satellite Question: One of the other six Primal Questions, specifically one that sits on either side of your Primal Question. The satellite question uniquely influences your relationship with your Primal Question.

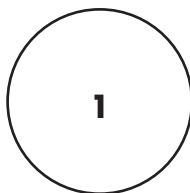
Primal Avoidance: The subtle, subconscious ways we try to prevent our Primal Question being answered with a no. It is self-protection that stunts growth and opportunities.

Primal Map: An illustrative way to see the things that are connected to our Primal Question. It is a helpful guide as you build your plan to maximize your gifts and become aware of the scramble. A Primal Map is included at the end of each of the seven Primal Question chapters.



SECTION ONE

Where It All Begins



THE PRIMAL INSIDE

The woman sitting across from me went silent. As we sat there in my family room, she stared at me in utter disbelief. Her face turned bright red. Her eyes fixed on mine with a savage stare. I had no idea if she was about to attack me or hug me. She was a mash-up of rage and ecstasy. And then she spoke.

“I’ve been in therapy for ten years. I’ve tried everything. I tried to make it all make sense. And now it finally does.”

Her name was Katy. She and ten others were attending a personal development workshop I was hosting in my home in San Diego. Sitting there in my family room, a transformational truth had crashed into Katy’s life. After countless years of going to therapy, being faithful to her religion, and reading stacks of self-help books, something finally clicked.

What happened that day?

Katy stood face to face with the reality of what I call her Primal Question: the hidden force that had been driving her life for years. At that moment, it felt like the light of a thousand suns lit up what had been in the dark for decades. She finally saw her life with stunning clarity.

The years of self-sabotage.

The crippling anxiety.

Her simmering anger from unmet needs.

The unresolved shame from being sexually abused.

Her fanatical need to control things at work.

It. All. Made. Sense.

But her Primal Question didn't just explain her pain; it also brought insight to her gifts that she never really understood.

Her expertise with details.

The ability to strategically solve big problems for her team.

Her supernatural ability to emotionally read people.

Her uncanny way of making people feel safe in her presence.

Once Katy knew her Primal Question, the scattered puzzle pieces of her life organized into a picture that she could finally understand. This new clarity gave her a sense of power and freedom.

For the past two decades, I've helped people like Katy overcome their biggest, messiest, and most critical challenges. Addictions. Failed marriages. Shame storms. Crushing anxiety. Self-sabotage. I've taken excellent notes from the battlefields of life, including my own brokenness of early childhood trauma and the storm that followed.

I've coached people on death row and in corporate boardrooms. I've been in strategic meetings in the White House, and I've counseled people at sex conventions in Las Vegas. I've coached Emmy-winning actors, Grammy-winning Hip-Hop artists, and A&E reality TV stars. I've worked with stay-at-home parents, anxious therapists, Navy SEALs, non-profit world changers, and a Chick-fil-A operator.

In this quest to transform people's lives, I've discovered one universal issue that applies to them all: Each person has a Primal Question seared into their being. And this question is the driving force behind their life.

Before we go too much further, I want you to understand that your Primal Question is not a negative thing. It's only a problem if you are unaware of it. We're not here to fix it but to discover what it is and understand its influence on you.

Think of the Primal Question as your floorplan for inner awareness. And if you can see your internal floorplan, you'll understand where to put your life's furniture. Without it, your inner world becomes a super-frustrating hodgepodge of clutter and overstuffed pieces that don't fit. Things like:

Wild emotions that don't make sense.

Dumb choices that you keep making that are totally illogical.

Little hurtful habits that undermine your happiness.

Unsafe people who for whatever reason you keep trusting.

We're going to stop these behaviors and unlock real freedom.

This book will aim to do four key things for you:

1. Uncomplicate Change

The magic of the Primal Question is that it boils down the majority of your problems into one clear idea. Within minutes, you will understand almost everything about what drives your life and relationships.

2. Supercharge Growth

This book will allow you to take massive action and avoid falling into the same traps that sabotage your growth. It will give you straightforward tools to maximize your goals, dreams, and relationships.

3. Simplify Language

Imagine trying to describe a blizzard if you had no word for snow. That's what it's like being stuck in your feelings without a way to describe the problems or the solutions. This book gives you the language you need to express what is happening inside of you.

4. Inspire Action

This isn't just a self-help book; it's a practical playbook for how to run your life. You will walk away with HD clarity on the problem and what to do about it. In many ways, you can be your own therapist and life coach.

I've spent over six thousand hours interviewing people about their Primal Question and how it impacts their life. I've facilitated twenty-two group labs focused on core drives, desires, and wants. I've torn through tons of research on attachment theory, trauma, and internal family systems. And I've boiled it all down to seven Primal Questions. Our mission here will be to help you

identify which of the seven questions drives your life and how to maximize it for your benefit. Think of the Primal Question as therapy accelerated through simplicity.

This concept is also intensely personal for me. After decades of being lost in the wreckage of my early childhood abuse, I found a new freedom. Through the Primal Question, I have radically healed decades of shame, fear, and self-abandonment. It liberated my life by giving me a simple language to understand what was happening inside me. I will share more about this later in the book.

But back to my friend Katy. After the workshop concluded, I pulled her aside to see how she was doing. With resignation in her voice she said, “Mike, I wish someone would have told me this sooner. I feel like I’ve wasted so much time. I’m relieved that I now know, but I’m also sad.”

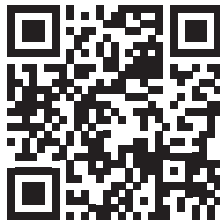
I told her I understood. That her feelings were okay. And to have compassion for herself in that sadness. Then I said, “But also, let’s get to living your life now. We’ve got some catching up to do, don’t we? Are you ready?”

“I am,” she responded. “More than ever. I’m ready.”

Go Deeper Breakout

Discover your
Primal Question
by taking the free
assessment at:

PrimalQuestion.com



GETTING TO THE ROOTS OF YOUR TREE

At your very core is a question that you desire to have answered every day. Every reaction, choice, and purpose is influenced by the answer to this question. All relationships, interactions, and emotions are attached to it.

Emma Young in *New Scientist* magazine estimates that 95 percent of our lives are lived unconsciously. I believe this is true of most of us. We are sleepwalkers in our stories. Too many of us live our days out of habit, not intention. And if we are unaware of our patterns, beliefs, and emotional needs, how can we possibly live our best life?

One of the common mistakes of personal development is that

The Primal Question gives you solid answers. Why do you do what you do? Why do you self-abandon and let fear control your decisions? What is your highest emotional need? What is your supernatural gift that the world needs?

we start with the external instead of the primal. Imagine your life is like a tree. Counselors, therapists, and pastors often focus on the branches of that tree. Trim this. Chop that. Stop drinking so much. Don't look at porn. Ditch those toxic friends. Cut down on the Cheetos and chocolate. Keep pruning those external things and eventually you will be happy.

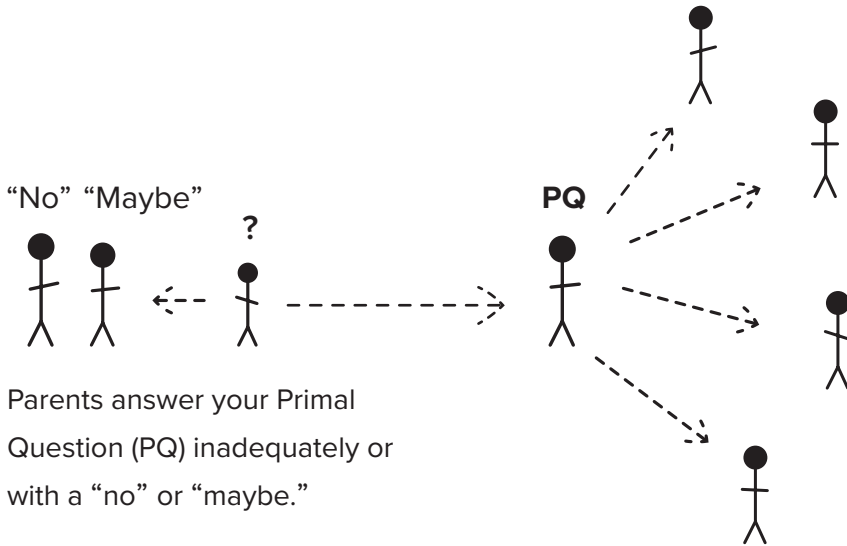
Unfortunately, it's a lot of work that doesn't actually work. At least, not very well. Not without constant effort and endless guilt. You can never trim your way to a better life. You need to get to the roots.

How Did This Question Get Inside of Me?

Like most aspects of your identity, your Primal Question was formed in early childhood. Author T. F. Hodge accurately states, "What surrounds us is what is within us." This is especially true of the family environments we grew up in.

Research shows that a child's brain develops connections faster in the first five years than at any other time in their lives. It is in this early development that the foundations for identity, behavior, and beliefs about life are laid down. Whether your caretakers knew it or not, they had an incredible influence on

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Parents answer your Primal Question (PQ) inadequately or with a "no" or "maybe."

Now as an adult you ask your Primal Question to everyone you interact with.

your concepts of love, safety, and belonging. The effect is so strong, it ends up defining the way you see and experience life as an adult.

Parenting and addiction specialist Dr. Gabor Mate says, “The parent-child bond is our most important relationship; through it we experience the world. The parent-child attachment relationship gives us our concept of the world: Is this place hostile? Is it friendly? Is it nurturing? Is it indifferent? We also learn who we are: Are we good? Are we bad? Are we acceptable? Are we worthwhile? All of this depends not on what the parent thinks of us but on how the parent unconsciously acts toward us.”¹

As a child, you had emotional needs for things like self-worth, safety, value, purpose, and inclusion. These needs show up as unspoken Primal Questions that demand an answer from your caretakers. When your core need is met, the answer to that Primal Question comes back as a yes and you no longer need to continue to ask that question.

However, when the need is not met or the answer to the question is confusing to the child, the answer registers as a no. This locks the child onto their unique Primal Question that they

will continue to ask into adulthood. They will keep asking this question, day after day, looking to have it answered with a yes.

A child will also take on the responsibility of answering their Primal Question for themselves. They will strategize how to get their Primal Question answered with a yes and adapt their behavior accordingly. Dr. Gabor Mate says, “If you’re not loved for who you are, you’ll tame the danger of not being loved by becoming charming. It happened with comedian Robin Williams. He began to make jokes to make his mother laugh. Is it a weird thing to make your mother laugh? No, it’s not weird at all if that’s the only way you can get close to her. And everybody celebrates him for this talent not realizing what they are celebrating is the defense of a helpless child.”³

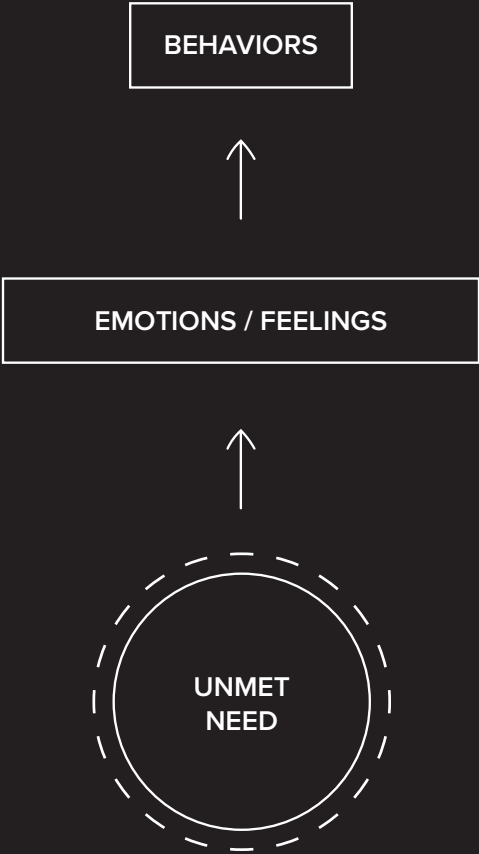
For our purposes, understanding our relationship to our caretakers is only an opportunity to understand the origins of our Primal Question. Our goal here is not to place blame. Although it's easy to blame our upbringing for our problems, it's not very helpful. In my experience, blame becomes a poison to our healing. It's like throwing sand into the gears of our growth. We simply want to understand the roots of your question and empower you to take back the control.

Go Deeper Breakout

A recent study followed up on elementary school students from the 1960s. Researchers discovered their personalities remained mostly unchanged from what their teachers recorded decades earlier.²

UNMET NEEDS DRIVE EVERYTHING

Personal development often focuses on fixing behaviors or controlling emotions. While improving in these areas can be very helpful, it is more powerful to identify the unmet need underneath it all. When you meet the need, you can change your emotions and behaviors.



**Your Primal Question
is the thing
underneath the
thing that
drives
everything!**

Go Deeper Breakout

NEUROPLASTICITY

Neuroplasticity refers to your brain's ability to learn new things. At a young age, plasticity is high, but as you age, it's not quite as automatic. This may explain why things you learned in childhood are so hard to shake. You picked them up at your most receptive time and must unlearn them when your mind is more rigid.

Trauma in the form of sexual, physical, emotional, or psychological abuse by anyone will also leave a deep mark on you. Suppressed trauma will continue to reemerge in the form of your Primal Question. This question created by trauma is then experienced, re-created, and lived out in your adulthood.

