

Great *Question*



Great leaders ask great questions. During His ministry on earth, Jesus asked about three times more questions than He answered. His questions still have the power to pull us out of our comfort, out of our overconfidence, out of our settledness in our world and into greater knowledge of His Kingdom. Jesus' questions can shake us up and help to reset our lives.

GREAT QUESTION • Luke 18:35–43 • Tim McConnell • August 11, 2019

One of my least favorite questions to be asked is, “What do you want?” My birthday is coming up. “What do you want for your birthday?” Christmas comes and I’m asked again. I always have a hard time. If I say something too big, I’m selfish. If I say something too small, I’m a loser. If I say nothing at all, I’m aloof and unengaged. You can’t really win. “What do you want?” is actually a pretty big question. In Jen Pollock Michel’s book, *Teach Us to Want*, she says a new field of psychology is springing up—it’s called Wantology. This is serious now. She says, “A wantologist helps clients verbalize their latent, unrequited desires and moves them toward achieving happiness by identifying the ways they can satisfy those desires.” Excellent! The premise is clear. If you can just figure out what you want and how to get it, you’ll be happy. But what if the things you want are the wrong things? What happens when what I want isn’t good? When my wants are unhealthy or damaging? What then? Oscar Wilde said, “There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants and the other is getting it.”

The whole world I live in is bent toward satisfying my desires. If I like a show on Netflix, they come up with more shows I would like. If I buy something on Amazon, I get offers for more stuff just like that. If I search for something on Google, all of a sudden, I get ads for that very thing on Facebook. I used to think that was an amazing coincidence! Actually, the whole world around me is trying to give me exactly what I want. But sometimes what I want isn’t what I need. Our series, *Great Question*, wraps up with one of the most challenging questions Jesus ever asked. You might have read right by it, but it’s actually profound. What do you want? Jesus doesn’t heal until he touches the heart. Jesus doesn’t extend his hand until he sees inside your heart. Jesus asks, “What do you want?”

“As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ He called out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (Luke 18:35–38). This sounds familiar, particularly if you were here last week. A man suffers on the margins, a man others walk by—in fact, Jesus’ people encourage him to walk by—but Jesus stops. There’s plenty of time. Only this week the man is blind instead of 10 men suffering leprosy. We are reminded again of who Jesus is. Jesus stops to regard those that others walk by. Jesus loves people, sees people and moves toward people, and the same is true for you. We are also reminded that the only thing we need to bring Jesus is our need, but that’s actually difficult for us

to do. The only thing this man brings Jesus is his blindness. The only thing we are required to bring Jesus is our need, our emptiness, our lack; but for independent, frontier, adventure-seeking Colorado types that’s not easy. We want to show Jesus we can, but what we are required to show Jesus is that we can’t. We have to admit our need. The man (Mark says was Bartimaeus) only brings his blindness to Jesus. The only thing needed is need.

Some didn’t want this to happen at all, but Jesus draws the man over. “Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ‘Lord, I want to see,’ he replied.” (Luke 18:40–41). Here’s our great question: What do you want? Why does Jesus ask? He can see the man is blind. The primary challenge in this man’s life is clear. What’s the question? Jesus always wants to know what is in our hearts. He doesn’t move His hand until he sees the heart. Why? Well, a blind man with a good heart is better off than a seeing man with a bad heart. If the heart isn’t straight, seeing or not seeing is not going to make much difference in the long haul. In fact, empowering this man with sight, if his heart is rotten, might do more harm than good. What do you want? Jesus has seen a little bit into his heart just by his cry of faith, his cry for help: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Son of David? I thought his father is named “Joseph.” Son of David. Son of Man. Son of God. These are all expressions of faith in Jesus’ supernatural origins. This Jesus has come from God. But the great question opens up the heart even more. What’s in there? What do you want?

The man answers, “Lord, I want to see.” I want to see. Would you share your deepest want with Jesus? This feels intimate. Face to face. Like Jesus pulled him aside and got in close. What do you want? If Jesus walked into your office tomorrow morning, or met you at breakfast, stood before you and said, “I’ll do three things for you today, whatever you want.” Like Genie-Jesus (bad theology here people)! Like Aladdin’s Genie. You’re always supposed to ask for three more wishes. But what would you ask for? Would it be good for you? I think so much of prayer is simply about opening our hearts before Jesus and being honest. Open your hope chest; open your wish box. What’s in there? Would you let Jesus see? This man told the truth. And he didn’t downgrade his hope. He didn’t scale down his request. He didn’t say, “Well, I could use a better cane.” Or, “A helper to get me around would be nice” or even “If I had a big pile of cash, being blind wouldn’t be so bad.” No. “I want to see. I know that’s impossible. I know it’s outlandish. But you asked what I want. That’s what

I want. I'm a blind man who wants to see." Can Jesus work with that? He can.

"Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God" (Luke 18:42-43). Verse 42 could also be translated "your faith has saved you" or "made you whole and secure." Notice, Jesus didn't say "your faith has restored your sight." No, the seeing is a gift. "Receive your sight." Receiving is something we do with a gift. Then Jesus declared that the man's faith also did something; faith is something. "By your faith, you are now saved. Faith has set you right with God. Faith has set your hope in the right place. Faith in Jesus has made all your tomorrows different from your yesterdays. By faith you are saved," or as we read elsewhere, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). He responds with discipleship, following Jesus, and with worship, praising God; and all the people around do the same. Why? Because maybe Jesus, Son of David, is the Messiah. Only Messiah answers to Son of David. Only Messiah heals the blind. Only Messiah brings salvation. Maybe this Jesus is what we have longed for and needed all these years. For all the different things I have wanted, maybe Jesus is actually where all my deepest desires come home.

What do you want? Would you show it to Jesus? Honestly? Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." What if your desires could be fulfilled? What if Jesus is really what you needed all along, deeper than these presenting desires? Life is too full of useless desires and harmful cravings. I'm embarrassed to show Jesus what I want. You know? If I just threw the box open and said, "Sure, Jesus, let's see what's in there. Here's what I want." Pop. I can imagine Jesus looking in there with a sideways glance, "Hmmm. Really! Let me see here. Eighteen-inch biceps. A million dollars. A cherry red Ferrari. Well, that might be nice. Oh, here's one: shoot par for 18 holes of golf. Son, that just ain't gonna happen." You'd be embarrassed, wouldn't you? I mean, hopefully there's some good stuff in there, too. A healthy marriage. Well-adjusted kids walking with the Lord. A vacation to the south of France. You know. (Just had to slip that in there on the good side.) You'd be embarrassed to throw the box open. But do you know what? Jesus isn't embarrassed, and he isn't surprised, and it is actually the exact kind of intimacy and trust and openness Jesus wants, to start to get in there with you and work with your desires, and start pulling you away from useless desires that never satisfy, and pulling you toward healthy wants, desires that

can be fulfilled and, in being fulfilled, are a tree of life.

I remember when I was a young man, around 18 or 19, and I had given my life to Christ when I was 12 at a Young Life camp, but I was starting to feel like I'd really been set up. It started to feel like my life was going to be nothing but conflict, a big fight from here on out between me and what I wanted to do and God and what He wanted me to do. The war was on. But a man named Simon was discipling me, building into me and helping me follow Jesus, and he showed me a verse, Psalm 37:4: "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." "What do you think that means?" he asked me while we were sitting in a booth at Subway eating lunch. I remember it. "Do you think that means God gives us whatever we want?" I wanted to say yes, because that sounded awesome. But there's not much evidence out there that this is how it works. "No," he said, "it doesn't mean God gives us whatever we want. It means God changes what we want. He puts desires in us. He alters the desires of our heart when we delight in him."

Suddenly I felt a little hope. It wasn't just that I was going to spend my life fighting God, but that God was going to start changing my desires, altering my appetites, away from useless desires and harmful cravings that are never actually satisfied and toward good things, godly things, healthy things that God would also fulfill. And what was the hinge? "Take delight." Take delight in the Lord. The more my heart is captured in worship, in devotion, in service to Jesus, the more I regularly take delight in Him ... well, maybe it's not one to one, but it's where change starts to happen. My desires change. Maybe I don't need 18-inch biceps. That's probably not going to happen. Odds are kind of thin. Arms are kind of thin. Maybe God has a better set of desires for my heart. Nothing will happen, though, until I'm honest, until I answer Jesus' question: what do you want Me to do for you? What do you want?

There is something wrong in the world that needs fixing. Is there anyone here today who disagrees? After the two weeks of shootings and hatred? It doesn't take very many young men with no foundation, with minds set on nothing but the belief that the people around them are a scourge, a scourge to the earth and a scourge to the nation—it doesn't take but one to light up the night with gunfire and cause vast tragedy and pain. There's something wrong, and it runs right through each of our own hearts. Each week we gather and take delight in God, hoping our desires will change a bit, away from the selfish, useless, harmful wants and into God's form of life. Each week we pause

for confession of our sins. In the sanctuary we recite a prayer together, in the worship center we do it with song as our worship leader tells us to pause and ask forgiveness. Why? Not to berate ourselves. But to ask for God to fix what needs fixing in each of us.

Sometimes we quote 1 John 1:8–9 in that moment: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” We can pretend all our desires are virtuous, or we can be honest before God and ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness is possible. Jesus carried the penalty of our sins in His own body to the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, He died to remove the penalty we deserved for our sins. Because of that, there is a fix. There is a cure. There is a remedy to the hatred, a solution to the murderous heart, a hope for all who are stuck in the lifeless rhythms of useless desires. There is a way out, a way home, a new way. It is found in Jesus. We seek forgiveness. But it doesn’t stop at forgiveness. Look, it says He will purify us. It says He will cleanse us. He will cleanse our hearts. Imagine a clean heart. Imagine a heart that longs for good things, godly things, loving things. It’s possible. It happens when we allow Jesus to ask us, “What do you want?” and we open the box, and He looks at us with loving mercy, rolls up His sleeves and starts to dig in.

Some of you here this morning, and some of you joining us online, have never taken that first step of faith with Jesus. I want to give you that opportunity right now. Can you imagine forgiveness? Not partial, but total forgiveness for the mistakes and wrongs and the scars you carry? Can you imagine a clean heart, a new heart? An end to the war with God and the beginning of a new partnership, you and Jesus releasing your heart from useless desires. This is what Jesus offers when you respond in prayer and allow Him into your heart. We are going to pray together. For some of you this is the continuation of a long relationship with Jesus, but for some, today is the day, this is the kick-starter you need, and now is the time to open your own mouth and with your own lips allow Jesus into your own heart. Imagine today walking out of here knowing forgiveness, knowing Jesus. Imagine tonight laying your head to your pillow knowing, knowing, that you are at peace with God. Let’s pray: *O Lord my God, I stand before you today to ask forgiveness. Thank you for Jesus who gave His life for me. My heart is open. My life is yours. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

STUDY GUIDE

GREAT QUESTION • “What Do You Want?”

Luke 18:35–43

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 18:35–43.

- 1) Reread verses 38–39. This man refuses to sit silently in his pain any longer. When have you found yourself in a situation where you’ve needed to cry out to God for help? How did God meet you in that time?
- 2) In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “... pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” When has pain allowed you to hear God more clearly?
- 3) Reread verses 40–41. The man is obviously blind and begging. What do you think about Jesus’s approach in this moment? Why do you think he would ask the man this question when He can clearly see what’s wrong?
- 4) If Jesus was to ask you this question right now, what would you say? What do you want from Jesus right now?
- 5) Reread verse 42. Jesus says that the man’s faith has healed him. Why do you think Jesus says this? Why is this significant?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Jesus works in this man’s life and it leads others to praise God. In the coming week, how might you share about a time when God worked in your life in a way that might encourage others to rejoice with you?

IN: Connect with Each Other

The desires of our hearts shape our lives and bend our habits. Our hearts must be drawn toward Jesus, not what Jesus can do for us, but Jesus Himself. Pray that the Lord will teach you what to want, that He will stir up desires in you that align with His will for you.