

January 19th, 2020

What Are You Looking For?

John 1:35-39

(Carolyn Arends)

1. According to some scholars, the Gospels record Jesus asking 307 questions, being asked 183 questions, and directly answering less than 10 questions.

- a) Why do you think Jesus asked so many questions?
- b) Why do you think he so seldom directly answered questions?

2. Read John 1:35-39

John's Gospel (especially the first chapter of John) is very succinct and powerful, with each word carefully chosen. Why do you think John chose to include the details he did in this exchange between Jesus and two of John the Baptist's disciples?

3. Carolyn noted that we have a complicated relationship with our own desire because we often either distrust all the longings of our hearts (thinking they are all evil, or that it's evil to want anything all) or we over-trust the longings of our hearts and become ruled by them. Which camp (if either) have you tended to fall into?

4. How easy is it for you to identify and articulate what you want in any given situation? Is it easier in some contexts (i.e., at work, with family, in friendships, with God), than others?

5. Read the following stories, taking note of the questions Jesus asks in each one:

- Matthew 20:29-34
- Mark 10:46-52
- Mark 20:20-21
- John 20: 11-16
- John 5:1-6

What do you notice about these questions?

6. Carolyn argued that one of the reasons Jesus pays so much attention to the desires of our heart is because our desires shape us—whether we want them to or not. Discuss the following quotes—noting where you agree, where you feel resistance, and where you'd like to explore further:

Quote 1:

Living a just and holy life requires one to be capable of [rightly ordered loves]: to love things, that is to say, in the right order, so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally. – Augustine

Quote 2:

Your deepest desire ... is the one manifested by your daily life and habits. This is because our action—our doing—bubbles up from our loves, which ... are habits we've acquired through the practices we're immersed in. That means the formation of my loves and desires can be happening "under the hood" of consciousness. I might be learning to love a telos [ultimate goal] that I'm not even aware of and that nonetheless governs my life in unconscious ways – James K. A. Smith

7. Carolyn argued that another reason Jesus asks us to pay attention to our desires is because "to be blind to our desires is to be blind to ourselves." Discuss any/all of the following:

- a) Why does it matter if we're blind to ourselves?
- b) Does the journey from self-deception to self-awareness matter?
- c) How is self-awareness different from self-obsession?
- d) Is there a connection between self-awareness and self-giving?

8. How do you work out the difference between healthy and unhealthy desires in your life?

9. Someone once said, "The man at the door of a brothel is looking for God." Can this quote possibly be true? Why or why not?

10.. On the following page are two possible exercises to help identify your own desires—your own answer to Jesus' question, "What are you Looking For?" Review the exercises as a group and consider each committing to doing at least one of them and sharing how you experienced the process next week.

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(John 1:35-39)

Exercises: Discovering What We Desire Most

Option 1: Write Your Own Obituary

Imagine that you have died and someone writes your obituary for your funeral. The exercise is to write your own obituary notice—not the one you are most likely to receive, but the one that you long for in your wildest dreams. Let your imagination roam freely. You don't need to show what you write to anyone else. Just be sure to get down on paper what you really want said about you. In other words, be sure that your obituary fulfills your deepest desires as you are aware of them at this moment.

Write whatever comes to mind, even if it feels like stream-of-consciousness. Use words, phrases, sentences. You can re-visit this exercise again in the future if you want, so do not try to perfect your answer now.

Option 2: List Your Desires

If the “Obituary” exercise does not feel inviting to you, an alternative is to just take a sheet of paper and simply list—without judgment—all of the longings and desires of which you are currently aware. Do not try to sort them out with your own cleverness and understanding. Sometimes it's hard for us to separate the weeds from the wheat. Simply be honest. When you've written down all the desires you can think of, consider praying a prayer like this over you list:

Lord, here are my real longings. Please, in your time, show me those that reflect your heart and those that don't. Help me to turn away from desires that are destructive and give me the courage to follow those that will genuinely bring me alive.

¹ Exercises adapted from *Questions God Asks Us* by Trevor Hudson