

Heart Matters, The Question (Part 1)

Small Group Questions ([audio](#) or [transcript](#))¹

The bible paints the portrait of the soul's panting, thirsting, yearning, longing, desiring after God. Regardless of whether life is going well or not, there is an overarching drive to know God more deeply and walk with Him more fully. We see in the pages of scripture a lusty, greedy, insatiable desire to get more of God. This is not only seen in the pages of scripture, but has also been historically true of men and women who were willing to do anything to know and pursue God. Why is it that we are so easily content to compartmentalize our faith, to do it on Sundays and live morally clean lives in mechanical obedience? Paul seems to be greedy for more of God and says that asking whether something is right or wrong is the wrong question to ask. Paul, instead asks, does this get me more of Jesus or does it rob me of knowing Him more deeply?

If the faith of believers, biblically & historically, have been characterized by a joyful pursuit of God, to chase Him, love Him, follow Him and be conformed into His image at all cost because of the surpassing greatness of knowing and loving Him as their ultimate Treasure, then why don't we? Why is it so unusual to find the man or woman in the church that have an insatiable desire to know God and walk with Him deeply? Why don't we?

1. If you evaluated your faith, would you say that you have anxiety over a lack of being closer to God? Explain your answer. (see Psalm 42:1-5, Psalm 63:1-8 & 51:10-12)

Psalm 42 opens by painting a portrait of the soul in absolute torture because it has become separated from intimate fellowship with God. Just like an animal that longs to find a drink in the barren wilderness is the soul that feels distance from God. Similarly, Psalm 63 paints a steamy portrait of a soul that is lusting after God - needing to be with Him and experience Him deeply. We probably can identify with these passages some of the time, but our lives are often times not characterized by this desire. The question we must wrestle with is, "do we have angst in our souls because of this lack of desire or are we content to have our souls numbly apathetic toward God?" Do we earnestly desire to be able to say that "your steadfast love is better than life" - even the best things in life?

2. When do you find your pursuit of God to be more of a driving force in your life, when things are going well or when things are difficult? (see Matthew 19:23-24)

Most find it easier to desire and pursue God when things are difficult. This is because we are forced to face the truth that we have very little control in this life and need Outside help! Control is an illusion that is intoxicating; affluence and wealth tend to fuel this illusion because the more resources that we have the more able we are to distract ourselves from ultimate realities and insulate ourselves from some of life's hardships. This is why Jesus cautions the rich that it is difficult for them to come to faith (19:23-24) and stay faithful (Mark 4:19). The broader question for most of us is, how can we keep from being distracted by worldly pursuits and resist the natural effect of using our wealth to insulate and distract us from pursuing God? The answer is probably not to sell everything and move to a third world country, though it might be and we should certainly be open to that! This is a question that there is not an easy, formula based answer for. This requires us to probe the depths of our hearts to see what we have set our ultimate trust in. A good diagnostic question to help understand this is, what do we look to and think if "I only had or accomplished that, then life will be ultimately meaningful & fulfilling."

3. Habakkuk describes a condition-less faith, do you have conditions on your pursuit of God (if God blesses me, protects me, prospers me, then I'll follow Him)? What happens if those things don't come to pass? (see Habakkuk 3:17-19)

It has become a common belief of many that if we follow the rules, serve, try to do good and live morally clean lives then God is obliged to protect us, bless our lives and prosper us. We don't say it like that, but that is often times one of our foundational theological underpinnings. Habakkuk's faith is quite different than this. He places no conditions upon God. Regardless of how things turn out, he will faithfully serve, love and pursue God. That is a different kind of faith than most of us have. The problem with putting conditions on our faith

like this is that difficult times will come; we live in a fallen and broken world and we all will be faced with times of difficulty and hardship. If our faith is constructed on a set of conditions, then we will not know how to handle difficulties and many abandon the faith because God did not hold up His end of the deal (in their minds). We reveal that our ultimate desire is for God's good gifts instead of the Creator of those good gifts.

4. Do you see full pursuit of Jesus as a means to greater joy or a limiter to your joy? Do you feel like if you pursue Christ fully, life will be dull, boring and less enjoyable?

This is a very important question to reveal what we really think and feel about God. God is the sovereign Creator of the universe and all things that are in it, so He knows how He designed things to operate. God is not out to squelch our joy, it is not His desire to make our lives dull and lifeless. Our greatest joy and fullness of life is found in Christ; this is the fuel that drives our pursuit (John 10:7-14, especially verse 10). Until we get past the thinking that life will be "no fun" if we chase Jesus with everything in us, we will never pursue Him. We are hardwired to express our joy through worship - the problem is that we naturally worship the wrong things (Romans 1:25).

5. Why do you think that Paul can say, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." From what you know about the life of Paul, would you say that he considered this to be a good exchange? Reflect on what you value most in life and ask yourself whether it is worth more than your pursuit of Christ (see Philippians 3:8-11)?

Paul understood that ultimate joy and satisfaction was found in knowing Christ and pursuing Him as His ultimate treasure in life. There is no hint in any of Paul's writings that he had any regrets for the exchange that he had made in his life. On the contrary, Paul said that "there is laid up for him [me] the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8 ESV). The call that God had placed on Paul (as an apostle to the Gentiles, Romans 11:13) is significantly different than the call that God has placed on our lives. Most of us have not been called to abandon everything in this world to go and share the gospel with those who have never heard so we tend to easily dismiss Paul's passionate pursuit of Christ. We find it all too easy to say, "yea, but that was Paul and I'm no Paul." We aren't Paul, but don't we want the freedom that Paul had in life? Don't we want the intimacy with God that Paul had? Don't let Paul's calling become an excuse for you not pursuing God.

6. Do you find that your faith is largely compartmentalized and something that you know, but don't regularly experience? Does your faith function primarily to make you morally clean or is it what presses on the motives of your heart as you pursue God?

It is human nature to compartmentalize things, even our faith. Some of the time faith becomes something that we do on Sundays and the tool that is employed to keep our lives morally clean and on track. Our obedience based faith tends to become formulaic in its approach (if you do this, then this will happen). But that is not faith, that is law (a list of what to do and not do). Authentic faith involves the pursuit of Jesus which involves asking ourselves heart level questions like where do I look for identity in life, what am I really trusting in to make life work, where does my ultimate trust really lie?

Summary:

Do you long to pursue Him with all of your heart? Do you long to have your faith reignited and proclaim with David, "restore to me the joy of my salvation?"² Do you desire to have your faith be more integrated and less compartmentalized? Do you want your spiritual life to be the driving force and passion in your life? Do you long to be the person who says, unlike those in Matthew 7:22-23, "I not just obeyed Him, but I knew Him and pursued Him!"³ Do you want your faith to be the thing that your heart looks to establish your life's identity, trajectory and pursuit? Do you long to be someone who experiences the power that accompanies a pursuit of Christ or are you content to have "the appearance of godliness, but [deny] its power?"⁴ Do you know Him? Are you discontent with mechanical obedience? Do you want to pursue Him more fully?

Do you want to be able to say, “whether I’ve got cancer and die at 33 or I live to be 104, praise Christ. And whether everything in my marriage is movie-esque and we flutter about in romantic harmony or every day is a battle to be faithful to one another and Jesus, praise God. This is a different kind of Christianity, isn’t it? It seems like most of ours have conditions, but not Habakkuk.”⁵ This is a condition-less Christianity. Are you driven, like Paul & the author of Hebrews, to cast off everything that distracts you from pursuing Christ - even morally good or neutral things?⁶ This is a different question than, “is it morally right or wrong;” this question asks, “does it get me more of Christ or does it rob me of affection for Christ?” What produces competing affections in your heart for Christ; what is robbing you of affection for knowing God more?

The gospel is not a list of things that we do and formulas that we follow to get a desired result. The gospel is we get God - we get to be reconciled with the Creator and He transcends everything else. One of the most destructive things that we do is construct nice, tidy formulas with bible references for how to make life work. The problem with this is that life is broken and it never works as planned - we all know this because life has taught it to us. This is the grace of God because if we can execute a formula then we don’t need a Savior. Are you chasing a formula or are you chasing Him? Are you swept up in things that resemble following Jesus, but aren’t really following Him at all? Doing good, serving well, and living in mechanical obedience is not pursuit of Christ and may well be damning in the end. He is the pursuit, not a list of things that we must execute flawlessly.

Our pursuit of Christ is driven by joy. God is not out to destroy our joy, on the contrary, He is after our greatest joy. Jesus is not just better than hardships, He is better than the best stuff in life - sex, good food & drink, fulfilling relationships, healthy marriages, great kids, etc. The gospels are filled with statements calling us to loose our life in order to find true life.⁷ Yes, we must deny, follow, love everything less than Christ and be willing to give it all for Him and His kingdom. The question is, “Why?” Is it just our duty? Is it just what is required? Is it because Jesus does not want us to enjoy anything in this life? No! It is because Jesus is after our greatest joy. He is calling us to exchange that which is fleeting and temporal for that which is ultimate, eternal joy.⁸

Why don’t we? Why don’t we pursue? Why are those who do so rare? Why are we so apathetic and unbothered by it? What stands in the way of us pursuing God with everything in us?

Application:

- Find a moment in a quiet spot and read Psalm 27:4. Where does the desire to pursue God come from? Pray that God would ignite in you a desire for Him. Spend time dwelling on this truth this week. (see also Mark 9:20-27, emphasis on 24).
- Identify the conditions that you have placed on God in your relationship with Him. We, often times, tend to make our faith formulaic; if I obey, follow and live according to His rules, then He is obligated to bless us, protect us, prosper us, etc...

Recommended Resources:

The Pursuit of God by AW Tozer (book)

When I Don’t Desire God by John Piper (book)

Don’t Waste Your Life by John Piper (book)

[*The Grace List*⁹](#) by Tim Kimmel (pdf download)

[*The Search for Happiness*¹⁰](#) by Tim Keller (message)

[*Do You Feel Distant from God*¹¹](#) by Francis Chan (short video)

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¹Audio: http://my.ekkleisia360.com/Clients/download.php?sid=5356&url=http://media.thevillagechurch.net/sermons/audio/200705200900HVC21ASAAA_MattChandler_HeartMattersPt1-TheQuestion.mp3&mediaBID=1128922

Transcript: http://media.thevillagechurch.net/sermons/transcripts/200705200900HVC21ASAAA_MattChandler_HeartMattersPt1-TheQuestion.pdf

² Psalm 51:12

³ “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:22–23 ESV)

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:5 ESV

⁵ *Heart Matters, The Question* by Matt Chandler

⁶ “I count *everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8 ESV); “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also *lay aside every weight*, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1–2 ESV)

⁷ As an example: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:24–26 ESV)

⁸ For further information, see *Jesus is After our Joy*. <http://thegospelcenteredlife.com/2011/07/17/jesus-is-after-our-joy/>

⁹ <http://blog.familymatters.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/The-Grace-List-Annotated.pdf>

¹⁰ http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sites/sermons2.redeemer.com/files/sermons/Search_for_Happiness.mp3

¹¹ <http://thegospelcenteredlife.com/2011/09/04/do-you-feel-distant-from-god/>