

# Ask Me Anything, Lord



Opening Our Lives  
to God's Questions

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*Feeding the Soul with the Word of God*

*Ask Me Anything, Lord: Opening Our Lives to God's Questions*

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One

## When God Asks the Questions

It was as simple as school supply shopping.

There I stood, my first time out as a mom buying school supplies for her kids. The school had posted a class supply list in Wal-Mart, which had inspired me to begin buying the crayons, markers, and notebooks that would turn my children into academic wonders.

The markers were easy. I tossed them into the cart and checked them off my list. Crayons? No problem.

I was feeling accomplished.

Then I came to the glue. My paper clearly said, “Do not buy no-run or glitter glue.” Undaunted, I scanned the glue varieties on the shelves.

Every single bottle was marked “no-run.”

Well, what does that mean anyway? You would think a teacher would want her five-year-old student to use no-run glue! Would it really matter if I bought what was on the shelf?

I decided to leave that item until later and buy the rest of the supplies, like the scissors that were next on the list. Blunt child scissors. That's what I needed.

Only there were some scissors with tips that looked more rounded than others. Did I need to get the really rounded ones or just the slightly rounded, more pointy ones? One of my daughters was left-handed. Did she need special scissors?

I decided to leave the scissors for later also. Surely, though, I could figure out the folders. I needed one half-inch binder. After walking down three aisles of school supplies, I discovered that the store didn't have a single binder in the correct size. Staring at the supply list, I began to wonder, *Did the teacher mean one half-inch notebook or one-and-a-half inch notebook?* It was hard to tell.

Thoroughly befuddled by what was probably an easy task for every other mom in the universe, I went home in defeat. I had to ask expert moms what to buy. All because I couldn't tame my incessant need to ask questions. Lots and lots of clarifying questions.

That's what you need to know about me, really, that in any room at any time, I am usually the one asking the most questions.

So it's not surprising that over the years, I've collected questions to ask God. Questions about the mysteries in Scripture. Questions about His love for me. Questions rooted in painful experiences. Perhaps you have a list of questions to ask God, too—things you've wondered over the years. Maybe, like me, you aren't even waiting until heaven to ask God. Instead, your questions have become prayers.

Have you ever asked God: Do you think I'm beautiful? Am I pleasing in your sight? Why did that little girl die from horrible cancer? Do you see that I'm afraid?

We're not the only ones asking God questions.

When one of Jesus' closest friends fell ill, his sisters sent word to Jesus: "Lord, the one you love is sick" (John 11:3). Surprisingly, Jesus

didn't rush to their home to heal their brother, Lazarus. In fact, by the time Jesus arrived, Martha greeted him along the path with "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21). Then Mary went out, fell at His feet and said exactly the same thing, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 32). Some of the bystanders even bluntly asked, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37).

God is big enough to handle the difficult questions from us. He invites us to be honest with Him and allows us to lay at His feet the things we simply don't understand. This God, who knows all things already, knows the hurt in our hearts anyway. It won't shock Him to discover we're struggling with doubt or bitterness. He won't be surprised by our feelings of insecurity and insufficiency.

That's what Jesus shows Mary and Martha when, instead of punishing them and the crowd for questioning Him, He answered their questions with action. He called Lazarus out of the tomb and displayed His power over life and death. Then He asked a question in return, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (v. 40). That was the goal all along, the answer to the "Why?" the crowd and the sisters had boldly asked Jesus. He wanted to show clearly for all to see that He was not bound by death, and in so doing, God was glorified.

Did you see how Jesus responded to these sisters, once hurting, now jubilant with the resurrection of their brother? He asked a question in return.

Jesus didn't ask them this question because He didn't know the answer. Nor was his query designed to put Mary and Martha on the spot or to shame them in front of onlookers. No, it was a way for Jesus to establish intimacy and vulnerability with Mary and Martha. He used a question to stir up their faith and root out lingering doubts about His power over all things. He asked a question so that *they* would know the answer.

Did they believe? Did they know that in all things God would be glorified?

Then I wondered, *Do I believe? Do I expect to see God's glory?*

Recently God's been using questions like these to stir up things in my inquisitive heart. I've been so focused on my own questions for God, my own need for understanding, my own attempts to know God more fully and place Him in a suitable box that I've been monopolizing the conversation. I've neglected His questions for me.

As I began this year, I felt God whispering a question into my heart. It was there in my quiet times when I prayed. It was in my mind as I drove, showered, and exercised. It became my constant thought companion.

This wasn't a question designed just for me. Rather, Jesus asked James and John this same question in Mark 10:36, only to discover they wanted personal glory and to sit next to His throne. He asked it again of blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:51 and learned that Bartimaeus simply wanted to see.

This year, He asked it of me. "What do you want me to do for you?" Now, before you start thinking of a wish list with a bigger house, no debt, a husband, a baby, or a car, that's not what this was about. God isn't a deified Santa Claus who sits us on His lap and promises whatever longed-for toy we would like. This question was not about material possessions, prosperity, physical needs, or earthly gain.

Instead, it was a way for Him to search my heart. Psalm 37:4 says, "Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." That's what this question sought out—the desires of my heart. What did I really desire? Did I want glory for myself like James and John? Did I want to see God more clearly like Bartimaeus? My answer to His question revealed more about my heart's focus than any of the questions I've been asking Him all these years.



From then on, as I read the Bible I discovered more and more questions that God had asked His people. Always questions to which He knew the answer. Always questions He asked not for His benefit, but for theirs—to plumb the depths of their hearts and bring them closer to Him.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, He restored His relationship with them by asking a question—“Where are you?” This question searched out not just their physical location in the garden, but how far they had strayed from God’s side and what it would take for Him to redeem them.

When He shared with Abraham promises of a son and Sarah laughed in her tent, He asked, “Why did Sarah laugh? . . . Is anything too hard for the LORD?” God already knew what was in her heart and what motivated her quiet giggle. He used this question to highlight her disbelief in God’s ability to do the impossible and bring her a child from a barren, postmenopausal womb.

When Jesus commissioned Peter as a leader in the New Testament church, He asked, “Do you love me?” not once, but three times. It was a way of searching out Peter’s shame for denying Jesus, and then restoring Peter to a place of ministry and forgiveness.

Sometimes, as with Peter, the questions are God’s way of blessing us. He longs to heal, forgive, and restore.

But God can also use questions to search us, know our hearts, and test what they contain. David asked God to do this in Psalm 139:23–24. He prayed what I consider a dangerous prayer: “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Honestly, that prayer frightens me sometimes. I *say* I want to know God deeply and walk in relationship with Him, but there are parts of my heart, dark and hidden away, that I would rather not admit exist. What will happen if God searches my heart and finds

sin there (as He surely will)? What will He require me to give up and change? It's a radical prayer of intimacy, humility, vulnerability, and submission.

When God started asking me these questions, a part of me wanted to ignore them and hide away, just like Adam and Eve in the garden, camouflaging themselves in leaves and standing breathlessly still, hoping that God would give up on His search for them. I was hiding in my own way, too.

It's the way I deal with mess in my life sometimes. Can I be honest with you? Often I shove stuff into closets rather than cleaning and organizing and purging. The towels in my linen closet aren't all perfectly folded and neatly stacked. I'm just thankful I had time to put the clean linens in the closet rather than leave them all jumbled up on my sofa. Surely I'm not the only one who hopes guests won't open closet doors!

For a time, my system (or lack of a system) works just fine. Visitors to my home see an external facade of cleanliness and order. Yet, behind the closet doors lurk messes. Eventually the mess overwhelms the closet and spills out into my home.

So it is with the secret sins that are hidden in our hearts. Generally, I'm pretty "clean" looking. I'm a church girl, born and raised. I read my Bible. I sit in the front pew. I lead ministries. By God's tremendous grace, I'm not struggling with the big, public, noticeable sins.

It's in the closets of my heart that you can find the hidden sins, all jumbled together and in disorder from lack of purging. These are the deep-down sins like jealousy, pride, anger, coveting, impatience, and impure motives. These sins I tried to keep private—just between God and me—so that I didn't need to deal with them. I could pretend they didn't exist and act as if my heart was as clean as the exterior of me looked.

In Matthew 23:25–28, Jesus addressed a group of people who worried more about outside appearances than the condition of their

hearts. He calls these Pharisees “hypocrites” because they “clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” They are “like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Wanting God to shove my sins and misplaced motives into closets instead of allowing Him to ask the hard questions that reveal sin deprives me of true freedom, of authenticity, of pureness of heart, and of greater intimacy with Him. It makes me an unusable cup and a whitewashed tomb, no better than a Pharisee.

It’s a harsh comparison, but sometimes we need to get a little tough with ourselves. Otherwise we’ll never change. We’ll remain superficial, comfortable, safe, hidden—and distant from a God who loves us and wants us to draw closer to Him. Instead of sitting by Christ’s side, we choose instead to trail behind Him, just like Peter, who “followed at a distance” (Luke 22:54).

God desires more than a superficial relationship with us, so He’s forever asking us questions that delve beneath the safe exterior we’ve created. Surely God knows that even when we look good on the outside, the interiors of our hearts are cluttered and clogged with sin too long left hidden. Before He even asks us what is going on in our lives, He already knows the answer.

King David told his son Solomon that “the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought” (1 Chronicles 28:9). Moses wrote, “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence” (Psalm 90:8). In Hebrews, we read that “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (4:13). God always knows our motivations and the condition of our heart.

It wasn't for His sake that He started asking me questions. It was for mine. Through His questions, He offered me blessing and His affection. But He also used these questions to search and test my heart—to discover whether my motivations were off and to see if my desires aligned with His will.

Truthfully, I was embarrassed and ashamed to show Him the ugliest parts of my soul, but I didn't need to be. An amazing thing about God is that He sees us fully and loves us completely. No matter what His questions reveal about our hearts, God loves us. That never changes. Chris Tomlin sings about this in “Indescribable”: “You see the depths of my heart and you love me the same.” To me, that's just as miraculous as His creation of the universe.

Let's be real about this. The process of cleaning out the hidden places of the heart is painful and hard at times. It means allowing Him to interrogate us so that He can bring sin into the open. It demands that we answer questions that identify our weakness. It involves confession and repentance, and not allowing those thoughts and motives to find their way back in again. It requires us to put aside the facade of perfection and deal with the fact that we're sinners.

Sometimes these tough questions are the only way for God to dig past the superficial and the comfortable. It's only when we answer Him that He can actually *do* something about our answers. And isn't that truly our hearts' desire? We don't want Him just to see what's wrong with us; we want Him to be able to do something about it. I want to be more like Jesus so that when people look at me, they see a reason to glorify God. I want to know God more, even when it hurts and even when it's difficult. Don't you?

Do you want to delve deeper in your relationship with God? Do you want to become a vessel fit for His use and designed to bring Him glory? Do you want to stop hiding from Him in shame?

## When God Asks the Questions

Do you want to clean out the closets of your heart? Do you want to receive the fullness of the blessing He's intended for you?

Then journey with me through the questions that God asked in Scripture. He asked them of people just like you and me. People who were not perfect and sometimes had secret sins they were trying to hide. People He was calling into revolutionary, powerful ministry, but who first needed to know that He could and would equip them for their calling. And now He asks them of us, Christ-followers on a journey to Christlikeness.



## **Make It PERSONAL**

- Have you ever felt like God used a question to search your heart, draw you closer to Him, or challenge your thinking?
- Do you struggle most with visible sins (like stealing, lying, cheating) or with the more easily hidden sins of bad motives or thoughts (like jealousy or anger)?

## **Make It CONNECT**

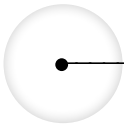
1. If you were in Mary and Martha's place as they spoke with Jesus after Lazarus's death, what question would you have asked? Have you ever had a reason to ask Jesus that question in your own life?
2. Can you think of other questions God asked in Scripture? Consider both the Old and New Testaments.

3. Read the following Scriptures as a group. Does anything about them frighten or unsettle you?
- a. 1 Chronicles 28:9
  - b. Psalm 90:8
  - c. Psalm 139:23–24
  - d. Hebrews 4:13
4. Read Matthew 23:25–28. The comparison hurts, perhaps, but do you have anything in common with the Pharisees?



### **Make It REAL**

- Luke 22:54 tells us that Peter “followed at a distance.” Are you willing to allow God to search your heart and draw you closer to Him—even if the process is difficult—or would you prefer to lag behind where it’s “safe”?
- If you’re ready to ask God to search your heart, just as David did, pray Psalm 139:23–24 each day this week.



## **Make It LAST**

### *Memory Verse*

Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:23–24

### *Journal Prompt*

If you've decided to let God search your heart, tell Him how you feel about it. Are you excited or frightened? Are there areas of your life that you know in advance God needs to clean out? What do you hope and expect as you pray this prayer and complete this study?