

## **“Do You Ask a Lot of Questions?”**

**Luke 11:1-13**

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October 12, 2003

Recently, our staff attended a Leadership Network Conference in Dallas, Texas. I enjoyed this conference for several reasons. I learned a lot about life and leadership while enjoying time away with staff.

I took twenty-one pages of notes listening to speakers from all over the country lecture on a variety of subjects. My favorites were Jim Collins, author of Built to Last and Good to Great, Dr. Ronald Heifetz, a Jewish physician and author of Leadership without Easy Answers and Leadership on the Line, and Ray Bakke, author of The Urban Christian and A Theology as Big as the City.

The common thread that ran through all the lectures I heard was this. We must be life-long learners, especially if we are going to lead people. Our minds must be as open as a radar screen to new thoughts and ideas. When you lose your curiosity, you lose your excitement for living.

Dr. Heifetz jolted me when he said, **“Our obsession with answers and certainty is causing us all kinds of problems.”** I wondered what kinds of problems he was referring to hoping he would elaborate. He headed in another direction with his thoughts, leaving me to answer my own question.

**What kind of problems has our obsession with answers and certainty caused?** After all, we have been led to believe that answers solve problems and dispel confusion and despair. How can answers create more problems? They don't. The obsession with answers and certainty does. The inability to live without answers to some of our questions or to search beyond what we know for deeper understanding causes problems. **What kind of problems?**

Our obsession with answers and certainty causes us **to embrace answers that will not work**. Because we find security in answers, we are tempted to accept faulty logic and follow those that speak it convincingly. We rush to select leaders that say what we want to hear even if it is not the truth.

This obsession with answers and certainty causes us **to walk away from challenges because there is no guarantee we'll succeed**. Jim Collins talked to us about the difference between failure and “fallure.” No one succeeds at everything he or she attempts and certainly not on the first try. How many times does a baby fall while learning to walk? A successful person or organization will fall many times when charting a new course, but will not stay down. That person or those people get back up and try again based upon an awareness of what needs to be changed.

Our obsession with answers and certainty can cause us **to act like we know more than we do**. Since believers are supposed to know everything, we don't want to give the impression there is something we don't understand. We equate a lack of answers with a lack of faith or a level of immaturity that we find embarrassing, so we cling to answers that may not even be true.

Our obsession with answers and certainty **can give us a false sense of pride**. It can give us a God-complex and make us think we are the final authority on certain subjects. Those that disagree with us must be heretics and enemies of God. Didn't Peter feel this way about the Gentiles until he had that dream recorded in Acts 10?

In a strange way, our obsession with answers and certainty **can keep us from discovering broader and deeper truths**. What we already know can get in the way of what we need to know to go to the next level. We can become complacent and satisfied with what we know and lose our curiosity. We can fool ourselves into believing that we know all there is to

know or all we need to know. Only those that use answers to frame their next questions discover things that others are willing to leave undisturbed.

In Daniel J. Boorstin's book, The Discoverers: A History of Man's Search to Know Himself and His World, he examined the lives and works of the world's greatest pioneers and discoverers. He studied Galileo, Columbus, Darwin, Gutenberg, Magellan, Faraday, Marco Polo, Freud and a host of others. A common trait he discovered in these innovators was this. Those that made the most significant discoveries were those that knew less, not more about the subject at hand. The greatest barrier to progress was not ignorance but an illusion of knowledge.

"If we think we know something, then we face an obstacle to innovation. The greatest discoverers dispel the illusions and reveal something new about the world," wrote Boorstin.

**If we are not to be obsessed with answers and certainty, what are we to focus upon?** We are to focus upon seeking, searching, learning and growing. We are to remain curious to the day we die always wanting to know more about God, life and ourselves. Some of the last words of Jesus on the cross were framed in the form of a question, weren't they? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was seeking, searching and learning until moments before his death and so must we be.

As I sat in that large auditorium last week listening to Dr. Heifetz talk about an unquenchable thirst for learning, my mind raced to Luke 11:1, "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'"

**Do you think these disciples did not know how to pray?** Had they never prayed? Had they not led in public prayer? Sure they had. I think they had prayed many times. Then why did they insist that Jesus teach them how to pray? After observing Jesus and recognizing the importance of prayer in his life, they realized that their knowledge of prayer was limited. Evidently, he knew far more than they did and they were curious. They wanted to know what he knew. They were no longer satisfied with what they knew and how they used it. There was more, much more and they had to discover it.

So Jesus taught them about prayer and how it worked. He talked to them about their needs and the opportunity to boldly approach God and talk about them. He reassured them that the one to whom they were praying could always be trusted to do the loving thing. His words filled with honesty and hope had to help them.

**Do you think Jesus was pleased with their request?** I do. I think he was ecstatic. He knew as long as they were asking questions and learning that their understanding of God and life would grow and mature. He also knew it would change their lives and their world, which is what he came to do.

**Was Jesus pleased with everybody that asked him questions?** No, because some tried to trick him with their questions in order to harm him. John 8:3-6 says, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him."

As pleased as Jesus was with the disciples' request, he had to be disappointed with the Pharisees' question. Not only did they try to trick Jesus but they also missed an opportunity to learn and grow because they were content with what they knew. Their arrogance and pride, along with their obsession with answers and certainty, kept them from discovering broader and deeper truths. How sad.

**Is he pleased with the questions you ask?** Do they reveal a genuine desire to grow and mature in your faith? Do they reflect your search for the "God beyond your God" and a deeper level of understanding? I hope so and so does our Lord. He knows as long as you cultivate your curiosity, you will be the kind of disciple he can use to change the world.

