

# “Healing Questions”

*John 9:1-41 & Matthew 7:7*

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March 19, 2023

**Prayer for Understanding** God of Good news, there is reading your Word, there is hearing your Word, and then there is tunneling ourselves into your Word—harvesting your Word, building a home in your Word, laying your Word over us like a blanket,

wrapping ourselves in your Word, know your Word like the back of our hand, singing your Word, planting ourselves like a garden in your Word. God, we could listen to scripture like we listen to the news, or we could cocoon ourselves in your Word and it could change us entirely. So bundle us up. Give us the latter. We want to know you.

With hopeful hearts we pray, amen

Today, we continue our Lenten journey of seeking good change. Pastor Hannah Garrity wrote: “We are invited to seek in the present continuous tense. This tense is active. I cannot change the world by changing others. I can change the world by changing myself. I focus on what I can control. I continually seek new layers.”

Pastor Sarah Speed wrote: “So often faith is portrayed as something you have or you don’t. You are strong in your faith, or you are knee-deep in doubt. It’s one or the other. This black and white thinking fits with our society’s obsession with choosing sides. However, it doesn’t fit with my experience of faith. For me, faith has always been an experience of seeking—seeking God in the world, seeking the good, seeking a deeper truth. I seek my way through prayer. I seek my way into scripture. I am forever cobbling together memories, feelings, questions, and experiences, all in an effort, to see God more clearly. I see that same hungry seeking in scripture. People ask questions. Jesus asks questions. The crowds ask questions. Everyone seems to be looking for something deeper. Their curiosity allows them to experience God.”

Pastor Lisle Gwynn Garrity wrote: “When I hear the term ‘seeking’ I think of Jesus words, **Matthew 7:7** ‘**Seek and ye shall find**’. This verse is often used to perpetuate a transactional, fairytale faith: if you just try harder or pray harder, then what you want will be granted to you. Life and faith does not operate in a predictable, merit-based system of seeking and finding, asking and receiving. Instead, I hope to live a seeking faith, that is ever-growing, adaptive, resilient, and filled with awe. We are now in the third year of a societal overhaul in which many of our disparities, vulnerabilities, and differences are more exposed. This chapter of life has most likely unearthed big, honest questions—about your purpose, your faith, your identity, your future. Bring those big questions to God. Engage in the spiritual practice of seeking, staying curious, porous, and malleable. Like Nicodemus, can you let go of what you used to know in order to begin again? Like the Samaritan woman at the well, will you let yourself be fully seen? Like Mary at the empty tomb, can you recognize God’s resurrection when you encounter it?”

Pastor Anna Strickland wrote: “Questions are a sign of growth, curiosity, and wonder. Children grow by asking thousands of questions. Many of the college students I have pastored come from churches that rush to answer questions quickly and definitively because they are seen as a sign of doubt, which is seen as a sign of lacking faith. But questions are an invitation into deeper faith. Questions are an invitation for the Spirit to move within the wonder, in the space between the question and the answer. Let us seek good questions rather than easy answers.”

When it comes to faith, sometimes there are bad questions—questions that are formed by assumptions, questions that lead us to judgment or isolation. When Jesus and the disciples encounter a blind man, the disciples ask, **John 9:2** “**Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**” They ask a bad question. Their question assumes that illness and disability are the result of sin; it assumes that the man deserved to be born blind; it assumes that physical blindness is a form of failure. Unfortunately, the crowd continues to interrogate the man and dissect the miracle of what happens to him. The crowd also asks bad questions because their intent is to drive him out and prove that Jesus is a heretic. Pay attention to the questions you ask. What assumptions do you carry? What is your intent? Seek by asking healing questions and letting go of the bad questions.

**John 9:1-41 NLT** “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. “Rabbi,” his disciples asked Jesus, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?” “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.” Then Jesus spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. Jesus told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “sent”). So the man went and washed and came back

seeing! His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?” Some said he was, and others said, “No, he just looks like him!” But the beggar kept saying, “Yes, I am the same one!” They asked, “Who healed you? What happened?” He told them, “The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.’ So I went and washed, and now I can see!” “Where is Jesus now?” they asked. “I don’t know,” he replied. Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, “Jesus put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath.” Others said, “But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?” So there was a deep division of opinion among them. Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, “What’s your opinion about this man who healed you?” The man replied, “I think Jesus must be a prophet.” The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. They asked them, “Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?” His parents replied, “We know this is our son and that he was born blind, but we don’t know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. That’s why they said, “He is old enough. Ask him.” So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, “God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner.” “I don’t know whether Jesus is a sinner,” the man replied. “But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!” “But what did Jesus do?” they asked. “How did Jesus heal you?” “Look!” the man exclaimed. “I told you once. Didn’t you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become Jesus’ disciples, too?” Then they cursed him and said, “You are Jesus’ disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but we don’t even know where this man comes from.” “Why, that’s very strange!” the man replied. “Jesus healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where Jesus comes from? We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but God is ready to hear those who worship God and do God’s will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.” “You were born a total sinner!” they answered. “Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out of the synagogue. When Jesus heard what had happened, Jesus found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.” “You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!” “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus. Then Jesus told him, “I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.” Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard Jesus and asked, “Are you saying we’re blind?” “If you were blind, you wouldn’t be guilty,” Jesus replied. “But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.”

The passage today uses physical affliction as a vehicle to point out how humanity always wants to be certain about the world. The religious leaders and crowd were certain that there must be a cause (someone’s fault) and effect (God’s judgment) at play. Jesus makes it clear there is no connection between sin and physical health, there is no connection between good living and wealth. Often, we want to believe, but only on our terms. We sift through scripture and our experiences and believe in what appeals to us, what supports our way of life, rejecting the rest. The religious leaders and crowd refused to believe Jesus, that neither this man, nor his parents, lifestyle had anything to do with his blindness.

We often struggle with grace, the free gift of God’s redeeming love for all people. We often want to put some kind of requirement, some kind of human action, or belief, to receive grace. The moment any kind of thought, feeling, belief or action is required to receive God’s redeeming love then there is no grace, for grace is completely free. If one judges someone to be beyond the grace of God, are they then asserting that there is a limit to God’s love, that God is small, that God’s love is weak and imperfect? Everyone is unique. Everyone’s circumstances are different. If God were to exclude anyone, wouldn’t this mean that God loves is biased, that God’s love has limits? I believe God is grace, perfect, infinite love, and all powerful.

Pastor Bruce Reyes-Chow wrote: “We want to believe that people should be held accountable for their actions; generally, this is not a terrible thing for society, but in this case, we are talking about a human’s personhood and the assumptions made about the person. The disciples’ first reaction is to debate the blindness and not deal at all with the human. Intellectualizing and theologizing outside of seeing the created being right in front of them led them to ask the wrong questions. Rather than ask, ‘How can we heal and help?’ they ask, ‘Whose fault is it?’ We do the same thing today when suffering, pain, and affliction are revealed right before us. Empathetic inquiry is set aside and

we rush to diagnosis and treatment before we even know the nature and depth of the problem we are trying to address . . . or if it is a problem at all. Often, we too easily view one another through a one-dimensional lens, asking misplaced questions based on mistaken assumptions:

- “They must be poor because of X, so let’s solve X by doing Y...”
- “She must be incarcerated because...”
- “The reason they are being deported must be because...”
- “He must be experiencing mental health issues because...”
- “He must be sick because...”

Sadly we often turn genuine struggles of the human condition into solvable formulas of cause and effect, which then gets warped into the idea that if something bad is happening to us, it is because God has determined that we deserve it. Often, we get stuck in cause-and-effect arguments concluding, “We know what we know and nothing you do or say will change our minds.” Such as:

- “We know people are poor because...”
- “We know people are incarcerated because...”
- “We know people are sick because...”
- “We know... We know... We know...”

Bruce concludes: “We do not know. The hope is that we could know more if we ask healing questions.”

The once blind man is surrounded by people who are spiritually blind. He is surrounded by people with rigid, narrow vision, people who refuse to seek, refuse to change, refuse to rejoice in healing, refuse to welcome everyone into community.

Can a person ever know what is the will of God for another person? Be extremely careful if you ever find yourself thinking you know something to be true for another for only God knows all the circumstances. Be skeptical of any group, any church, that claims they know what they are doing to be right, and everyone else is wrong, so everyone better join them in living their way. Jesus said, **“I entered this world to show those who think they see that they are blind.” “If you were blind, you would not be guilty, But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.”** In other words, if you think you know, then you probably do not know. Admit that you do not know. The real danger is claiming you know when you do not know.

Reimagine how this story could have gone had different questions been asked, with gentle curiosity and compassion. What if the blind man’s neighbors asked: How do you feel? How can we help? How can we welcome you into community? Will you be our guest at worship? What if the man had asked the crowd: What are you afraid of? What if the Pharisees had asked one another. Is it time for us to change our views?

What does this scripture say to you about judging another, being certain that a certain way of life is sinful? What does this scripture say to you about how to treat immigrants, refugees, an outsider, the outcast, the marginalized? How will you shift your questions from exclusion to inclusion? How will you seek to change by asking healing questions. After a disaster, crisis, illness, or argument, let go of why questions and seek healing questions. How can I help? How can I create healing? How can I change to bring love to this situation? How can I create a joyful harmonies community?

#### “Jesus in the Psych Ward”

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

He’s in group therapy, plastic chairs in a circle.

Paper cups with weak coffee. Everyone in the room has seeking eyes.

The Pharisees admitted him. They said things like,

He’s more than we can handle. They let the rumors fly.

The other patients like him. They say, He listens to me.

He calls them by name.

And when one of them asks, Is this our fault? Are we here because we sinned?

Jesus does not wait for the facilitator to speak.

He crosses the circle. He kneels down. He grabs their hands in his and says,

Child of the covenant, God loves you too much to ever wish you pain.

Bodies and minds crumble sometimes, but God’s love for you does not.

And after that there were happy tears and the group was dismissed to lunch, where they broke bread and no one talked of sin. Amen