

On the questions we ask.

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John Beaumont recently used this allegory to ask some questions:

Picture in your mind a typical city with its rush and bustle, noise and crowds, stresses and strains, streets and alleys, cars, buses and trucks, and in the evenings its lights, home fires and a measure of smog as well. People are busy with work, family commitments, appointments to keep, meetings to attend, and interminable work loads.

In the city among those who are weighted down with continual busy-ness, problems, burdens and a sense of helplessness there are one or two who dream that there has to be a better way, and who crave for a more leisurely personal life as well as a more satisfactory family life. One such person fills a back-pack and heads for the mountains, wanting to breathe the mountain fresh air and to gaze at the stars and night sky away from the city's glare, smoke and fog.

Several others individually head in the same direction, wanting to live more simply for a while, to view the skies, listen to the silence and leave the old familiar routine that has become so regimented, irksome, frustrating and 'soul destroying'. Before long others also get the same idea and head in the same direction until quite a crowd of folk are there, developing their own alternative life style. Some notice, however, that before long they are beginning to form their own set of ordinances and by-laws. Gradually questions begin to be asked. Why are we here? What lies ahead for us? Are we in danger of stagnating and becoming satisfied with what is good but not really ideal? Are we becoming like what we left? Is this all there is?

Let us use the allegory to ask ourselves a couple of questions:

1. *Why are we here?*

To get the answer we have to look back at the last 21 years and see the guidance of the Lord on our lives. Our mission statement when we were a structured church was, "To know God and be satisfied with Him." His guidance was in that direction all the time. We were never allowed to adopt a mission that had anything to do with building a church.

So when the time came to lay down the structure and the name in order to get to know Him better, it was a logical step. We were used to lay down things in order to get to know Him better by then.

We walked out of organised religion in trepidation but with the conviction that that was the only way we would fulfill our mission. That is why we are here – because we want to know Him better and develop lives that will manifest our satisfaction with him alone.

We just had to get out of our comfort zones to get what we desired.

2. *Are we in danger of stagnating and becoming satisfied with what is good but not really ideal?*

For a while now we have been feeling that we were settling down again in a new pattern. In stead of coming together once a Sunday we were coming together once a month on a Sunday but the problem of dependence on another to hear the Lord started to manifest again. The participation was becoming less and less and the dependence on others to regulate our activities was increasing. We are much freer than we ever were but the root of the problem always tends to bear fruit and the fruit is dependence on man. The problem has always been in our hearts and because the problem is inside it will make a mess of any structure we participate in. We create the structures and they become restrictive because we become dependent on them for our security and lose the freedom of depending on the creativity of

the Spirit. Man looks for security and finds it in rules, recipes and formats. The evidence is all around us in economics, politics and religion. The answer to the questions is 'yes, we are settling down for less than the best and we will do it again'.

3. *Is this all there is?*

It was our need for security that kept us bound in the structure not the structure per se. Unless we have dealt with the desire to find security in defined practices we will just create another structure and find ourselves back in the place we have left.

I must confess that this style of doing church suits me. We are enjoying our Christian lives for the first time as we should. We are not under any rules, responsibilities or expectations and we find it beneficial to our health and our relationship with Jesus. But... is this all there is?

Unless we define the destination we will not continue on the journey because we will never know whether we have reached our destination. We will be tempted to camp along the road and call it the destination. We tend to create our own destinations as it suits us.

4. *So what is the destination?*

The destination is still to know God and be satisfied with Him so that didn't change. What has changed is my perspective. I used to work to reach my goal. I am now doing it differently. It is as if the destination has come into focus. Because I can define the end of the journey better, it is easier to see that the path I am on is not the shortest and most scenic one available. Because the journey is defined it becomes more tangible and I find that I can't stay camped along the road for too long. When one comes nearer to your holiday spot at the sea, no one wants to stop and spend too long at a Wimpy anymore. That is the sort of thing you do when you still have a long way to go. I taste the end of the journey now and I don't want to waste much more time to get there. I smell the sea at last!

5. *What is your inner question?*

The one thing that has brought the destination into focus more than anything else is a change in the question that I ask myself virtually all the time. It is an inner question that I can only now define. I have been asking it for many years, actually for my whole life but it is only now that I know how important this question has been and how it has defined my behaviour.

When I distill my life as a pastor into one question, then it would be, "How can I change them?" "Them" being pre-Christians, Christians at large, the members of our congregation and society. I taught, prayed, wrote, counseled with the desire to change the lives of people and that influenced the way I heard God and the way I lived. It also influenced the way I related to God. I was just busy answering a question. I wanted to make a difference and I measured most of what I was doing against my success in changing people and society. I was perpetually missing the mark and feeling disappointed. Take some time and think about the question you are asking when you relate to your children, your spouse, your employees or employer and above all our beloved politicians. How does your subconscious question influence your actions?

6. *What is the new question?*

Since I have come back from Ireland I discovered that another question was hiding deep in me. This question has always been there since Jesus came into my heart but because I was so intent on answering the other question, I was never aware of this one. During the last couple of years I have unmasked the old question and seen its destructive power. Since then I am constantly

turning away from it. In the void that was created by my turning away, I have discovered a new question and it is changing my life.

I am asking: **"How can I love more?"**

7. *What is the effect of the new question?*

Because love is so dynamic, I can't ask this question and remain in the same place. As growing love between a man and a woman requires creativity in being together and growing together, so a growing love relationship between me and Jesus requires the creativity of our match maker – the Holy Spirit. If I am bound in any tradition or regimen, whether it is in what I wear or how I worship or when and where I "go to church", I am not free to flow with His creative thought. Both the expression of love and my receptivity to it are bound if I only ask the question, "How can I change them?" and I will never discover the beauty of real love and the offspring that it produces. That is why we recently asked (again), "Is this all there is?" and He answered with a love call, calling us to move even further away from the confinement of the familiar. No person can be in love and be satisfied with second best. We can not love and be satisfied with hearing the words of our heavenly Lover from the lips of a third party, however spiritual and anointed he or she is. Love requires intimacy and intimacy is hindered by the presence of a third party.

So we decided to take another step on the journey and to close the regular monthly meetings for a while. We want to see what the Holy Spirit will do when we are really getting hungry. We pray that we will be hungry for fellowship and for discussion. If we are not finding that hunger in us then we will have to go back to the drawing board. If I don't desire to be with my friend then there is something wrong with the friendship and I will have to sort that out soon or allow the friendship to die.

8. *Going beyond the questions.*

If all of us ask the question, "How can I love more?" in every situation we encounter, then we will not disappear and become a "phantom church". We will start to hear the Holy Spirit for ourselves and there will be more connection than ever before. We will become hungry for fellowship and for unity, for communal worship and for prayer. Love will propel us to reach across the divisions of names and structures and learn to love the whole church. We will love Jesus more and His love will flow from us like a fountain towards everyone He loves – both in and outside our circle of friends and our comfort zones.

We may have to discipline ourselves in the beginning to ask this new question but it will become second nature after a while and it may just produce the miracle we have been praying twenty four years for.

Paul said that faith works itself out in love (Gal.5:6). We are only asking the right question now because our faith has grown enough that we can begin to see the possibilities that exist if we can really love like Jesus. Let's continue to ask for faith to believe that He has deposited His love in us when He came to dwell there and that it is available if we continue to ask.