

# Searching Questions

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I'd like us to turn back together for a short while this evening to the passage that we read in the Gospel of John. As I mentioned, we recently started a series on this wonderful Gospel and over the past couple of weeks we've been working our way through chapter 1.

John 1 is one of the most amazing chapters in the whole Bible. From the very first sentence, the chapter is just mind-blowing in terms of what it presents to us. There's just wave after wave after wave of some of the richest teaching in Scripture. So, verses 1 and 2, you get given, straight away, this astonishing insight into the eternal being of God himself.

And you discover that at the foundation of all reality is a father who loves his son and a son who loves his father. You come to verse 12 and 13 and John speaks of the amazing privilege of being born into the family of God so that the eternal father of God, the son, can become your father forever as well. Verse 14, you have the incarnation, the incredible truth that the eternal son of God has become one of us. He's become like us, all so that we might be able to become like him. 17 to 18 speak of the extraordinary revelation of God in Jesus. And that means that if you want to know what God is really like, it's Jesus that you look at. Verses 19 to 27 speak of the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies, showing us how God's plan of salvation is being perfectly worked out across the ages of history. And verse 29 speaks of the glorious work of Christ's atonement as the Lamb of

God. Jesus dies in our place and he does it to take away our sins. He does it to bring us back into relationship with God. John chapter one is a fountain, a massive fountain of utterly astonishing theological truth. But as we come to the last part of John this evening, we discover that it's not just a chapter full of amazing theology, it's also a chapter that presses home to us some of the most urgent, relevant and important questions that we could ever think about. And it's these questions that I want us to work through today.

Let's read again at verse 37 and 38. The two disciples heard John say this and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, what are you seeking?

[ 3 : 15 ] Our title tonight is Searching Questions. These verses are describing to us some of the early encounters that Jesus had with men who were going to go on to become his disciples. It's good to remember that in the early part of Jesus' ministry, he had more than one encounter with some of the people who were to become his disciples. He had more than one encounter with them before they actually became his disciples. And it seems to be the case that here in John 1, you have the first time that Jesus met some of them. And it's an amazing encounter. But if you read in Mark 1, Matthew 4, Luke 5, it looks as though there was a later, another later call where Jesus met Peter, Andrew, James and John on the shores of Galilee. So it looks as though Jesus met them here, but then they kind of carried on with their normal lives. They went back to their jobs and then they met him again and they left their fishing boats and followed him. And I think that's one of the most wonderful things that we're told about the disciples. It's reminding us that for them and for most people, their journey to faith in Jesus was gradual. And it's reminding us that if you can't pin down an exact date or an exact moment when you became a Christian, if it was much more of a gradual process where all you can say is that I know now that I follow Jesus and I know that there's something different about me now than there was way back then. I can't pin down when it happened, but I know now that I'm following Jesus.

If you've just got that gradual, almost hard to describe conversion process, then it means you're exactly like Peter, Andrew, James and John and people like that. Please don't ever think that that in order to become a Christian, you have to have this one bang moment where lightning crashes across the sky or something astonishing happens. That can happen. It can happen, but please, please remember that happens to the minority of people. That's a minority experience. For most, it's gradual for these guys. It certainly was. I want us to focus, however, on Jesus's question in verse 38 that you can see on the screen there. In this passage, two of the disciples of John the Baptist heard John say, Behold the Lamb of God when Jesus walked by. So they followed Jesus. We know that one of them was Andrew and the other, we don't know for certain who it was, but many people have assumed that it was John who wrote the gospel. And so they followed Jesus. He speaks to them and they spend the day with them. But it all starts with Jesus asking one of the most important questions that a person can ever consider. Jesus says to them, What are you seeking?

And I want us to notice first of all that in the gospel of John, this is the first thing that we hear Jesus say. This is the first thing recorded of Jesus's speech. It's also one of the most important things that will ever hear Jesus say. What are you seeking? Now, sometimes when we read the Bible, we come across statements that have a huge amount of depth behind them and you read them and you've got to spend a lot of time thinking and unpacking and digging into it in order to be able to figure out just what's being said. A great example of that is John 1 verse 1. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. You need to do a lot of thinking. A lot of thinking time needs to go into that verse because there's an enormous amount of depth behind that statement. But there are also statements in the Bible that are dead simple. They're totally clear and there's no difficulty getting your head around them. And Jesus's words in John 1.38 is definitely an example of one of those statements. It's simple. It's clear. It's easy to understand and it nails everyone of us. We are sitting here today at the start of a new week. It's 11th of September 2022. We're all a week older than we were this time last week. We've all got one day less in our lives than we had yesterday. We all have a week ahead of us full of opportunities, full of challenges, full of potential, full of risk. We're all walking, stumbling, battling through life as all of that happens. What are you seeking? What are you looking for that you haven't got already?

What's the gap that's missing in your life? What do you want to accomplish this week in the next seven days? What's a good week going to look like? A successful week? What do you want to be different about your life in a year's time compared to what it is now? And even in this hour that we're together at church tonight, what are you seeking? Are you trying to avoid feeling guilty about missing church?

Are you trying to keep a spouse or a parent happy? Are you trying to fulfill a duty? Are you trying to pass the time? Are you trying to hear a good sermon? Still waiting for that I'm sure. Are you trying to get approval? Are you trying to feel as though you're in the right? What are you seeking?

[ 9 : 32 ] And no matter where you stand before Jesus, whether you've been following him for a year, whether you're fairly new as a Christian, whether you're not that sure where you stand, you belong to be a Christian but you don't feel like you are one or you're not sure if you're certain or whether you're just kind of numb to it all and just going through the motions, wherever you stand, whatever you think, this question is so important. And I want you, I'm not going to make you do it out loud but I want you to do it in your head. I want you to finish this sentence.

Right now the single most important thing that I am seeking in my life is, sorry that's grammatically incorrect, isn't that awful? Right, sorry, I'm going to correct that.

Right now the single most important thing I'm seeking in my life is, I'll have a think of what you're thinking about it. Jesus asks one of the most important questions you could ever consider and it's the question that leads to his first encounters with men who would become his disciples and I want us to look at that encounter and I want to look first at Andrew and Philip and then at Peter and Nathaniel and in it all I want us to see more and more of the searching questions that Jesus confronts us with. So first of all let's look together at Andrew and Philip.

They're both quite similar in this passage because they both follow Jesus, some different days it happens but they both follow Jesus and having followed Jesus they both go and tell others about what they found. You see that in verses 39 to 40 for Andrew he goes and spends a day with Jesus and when I read these verses part of me wishes that we knew what that day involved, what those conversations involved and it says there you can see that they stayed the day with him for it was about the tenth hour but we don't know what actually happened, we don't know what they spoke about, we don't know what that day consisted of. The only thing that we do know is that by the end of that day Andrew was convinced without any doubt that he had found someone incredible, he had found the Messiah. The same thing happens with Philip, it's interesting to see how similar they are verses 43 to 46. Philip also follows Jesus and again we don't know what Jesus said or did when they were together but by the end of it Philip goes straight to find Nathaniel to tell him what he's found. So what did they find or perhaps a better question is who did they find?

Andrew says the Messiah, Philip says the one whom Moses and the prophets wrote about. In other words they found what they had been waiting for, they found what they'd been longing for.

[ 13 : 03 ] For Jews in the first century like Andrew and Philip life was hard, their nation was under Roman rule, their culture was under threat from Greek influence, 70 odd years earlier they'd had a kind of national fight back against the Romans where they'd been brutally crushed and the great days of the Old Testament when David was king, when Israel was strong, when God was with them all those days seemed like ancient history. As a nation they had lost so much and so much of that had been their own fault. But in the midst of all the failures of Old Testament Israel, through the prophets God had given promises that a king was going to come and that king was going to be God's Messiah.

That's what Andrew speaks about. Messiah you'll know is a Hebrew word in Greek it's the word Christ, it's the same word it means anointed one. Pointing us to the fact that this one who was going to come would be God's anointed one, the great prophet who would reveal God, the high priest, the great high priest who was going to deal with sin forever and the magnificent king, the king of kings who would save his people and restore God's kingdom. In other words the Messiah was going to be the one who'd come and put right everything that had gone so badly wrong. It was those promises of a Messiah coming that Andrew and Nathaniel and Philip and all of the Jews around them were holding on to and that meant that for years and years and years they were waiting and they were longing and here Andrew and Philip find what they've been longing for. They find what their parents and their grandparents and their great grandparents were all longing for because if Jesus is the Messiah then salvation has come, restoration can begin and now there is hope. When they found Jesus they found what they were looking for and that is one of the most important lessons that we can ever learn about the gospel of Jesus Christ, the fact that that's exactly what Jesus does for us. We are not first century Jews but we still long for hope and for peace and for salvation and the amazing thing is that that's what you find when you find Jesus and it's so crucial that you recognize this, especially anybody here who's wondering you what would it be like if I did become a Christian, what implications is it going to have on my life and maybe there's the fear you know what's it going to ruin about my life. Well what's it going to do? What's it going to do to you? Well that gap in your heart, that gap that's created by a longing to have something to live for, the gap that's created by having a fear about life, about death, about changes, that gap created by an uncertainty about eternity, anxiety or confusion about what life is all about, that gap that knows that there's got to be something more, that gap that longs for an explanation of reality, that gap that needs to know that despite all your weaknesses and mistakes you're still worth caring about, that gap that exists in every human heart, that gap that we try to fill with all sorts of other things that are never going to give us peace, that gap that cries out, is there any hope when you put your trust in Jesus, that gap gets filled, that gap gets filled.

Now you've got to be off your head if you don't long for that gap in your life to be filled and that's exactly what Jesus offers you.

The question of what are you seeking is one of the most important questions that we can ever ask but that also means that one of the most incredible things you can ever experience is the moment when you can say I have found it, I found what I was longing for and that's what happened to Andrew and Philip, that's what happens to every single person who follows Jesus and for these two young men they were so amazed that the first thing that they did was to go and tell others and that brings us to look at Peter and Nathaniel. Like Andrew and Philip Peter and Nathaniel are also quite similar if you compare them in this narrative, they're both brought to Jesus by other people and for both of them we have a record of what Jesus said to them so it's an interesting contrast there, we don't know what Jesus said to Andrew and

Philip, we do know what Jesus said to Peter and Nathaniel. Before we go into it I just want to note that we often talk about reaching out to the community and we think about how we want to connect with people and bring them into church. You do not need to go past this passage to see one of the best examples on how to reach out to people about how to evangelise. Andrew goes and brings Peter to Jesus, that's incredibly important, he doesn't sit and wait and think I hope Peter might come, he goes and gets him and he brings him and then in Philip you see the best invitation to church that you can get and it's only three words long, he says come and see and it's the best invitation because it's clear, it's intriguing but it also challenges us to make sure that if people do come to see and it challenges us to make sure that what they see is a warm joyful welcoming community where Jesus, Jesus' goodness and beauty is evident from the minute they walk in the door.

[ 19 : 31 ] Now there's loads that we could say about Peter and Nathaniel and what I want us to do is just focus on four searching questions that lie behind what Jesus says to them. The whole of John's Gospel is challenging us to think about what we think about Jesus, challenging us, confronting us with the claims of who Jesus is and challenging us as to whether or not we believe them and so this is a great section as part of that overall purpose where behind this what looks like a very innocent conversation and we're being pointed to four massive questions, four searching questions that we all need to consider. Two of them are in relation to Peter, two of them are in relation to Nathaniel. So look again first at verses 41 to 42, Jesus says to Peter, you are Simon, son of John, you shall be called Siphaz. Now there's no question in that verse but behind it I think there's two massive questions. The first is the question of identity. Jesus uses Peter's name and then, sorry, Simon's name and then renames Simon in verse 42, you see it so clearly there and all of that is pointing us to his identity. Now today that's not always so obvious for us because we tend to ground our identity more in our jobs or in our possession or our looks or in the place where we're from but in biblical times in terms of your identity your name was hugely significant, it captured and represented who you were. To talk about someone's name was to talk about their identity. Simon meets Jesus and immediately it's clear that Jesus knows exactly who it is. In fact it's only in meeting Jesus that Simon will discover his true identity.

But Jesus gives him a new name as we said, Simon's renamed Peter. That raises the second question, the question of purpose. At this stage I'm sure Peter probably wondered what Jesus meant. He was like why Siphaz, why that name, what is why is he calling me a rock? It's only later of course that it becomes clear that Peter the rock would have a foundational role in Jesus's church.

Right now what's clear is that Jesus has a new purpose for Peter and so just like Abraham and Jacob in the Old Testament this man is getting a new name to show that he's going to play a key part in God's plan. All of that means that it's only when Peter meets Jesus that he discovers what his purpose really is. For when Nathaniel, well initially he's skeptical about Philip's statement especially when he finds out that Jesus comes from Nazareth but then in verses 47 to 51 he meets Jesus for himself and they have this fascinating conversation and again there's two more searching questions that lie behind what Jesus says. First there's the question of knowledge in verse 47 to 48. Jesus meets Nathaniel and he clearly knows him, behold an Easter light in whom there's no deceit. In fact Nathaniel then immediately asks him how do you know me? And so there's the question of knowledge of him and so just like he was with Peter Jesus makes it so clear that he knows him.

Nathaniel stunned but he also realizes that Peter was right when he meets Jesus as he finds the person that Philip was right rather. When he meets Jesus he finds the person who really knows him.

And that points us to the final searching question, the question of authority. In verse 49 Jesus, Nathaniel describes Jesus as the Son of God as the King of Israel. Now instantly he's ascribing authority to Jesus and I'm sure in Nathaniel's words he was ascribing the highest authority to him but then in verse 51 Jesus raises the stakes even higher by referring to himself as the Son of Man. Now again we can so easily miss that but for a Jewish mindset that title was hugely significant because you go back into the Old Testament, you go back into the prophecy, you go back to Daniel chapter 7 and you find the description of one spoken of as a Son of Man who is given from God all authority, power, glory and dominion and that dominion is going to last forever and Daniel 7 1 to 14 is where you read it and so when you see that title Son of Man one of the things that should immediately pop into your head is authority. It speaks of Jesus having the highest authority, the authority of God himself and of course this makes perfect sense of what we'll discover later in John in chapter 5 Jesus says, for as the Father, as life in himself, so he's granted the Son to have life in himself and he's given him authority to execute judgment, why? Because he is the Son of Man. When Nathaniel meets Jesus he discovers where authority really lies and so these four questions lie behind the interaction between Jesus and Peter and

[ 25 : 18 ] Nathaniel, the question of identity, of purpose, of knowledge, of authority and what I want us to see is that these are searching questions and we'll see that if we rephrase them as we apply them to ourselves and as we do they become even more searching. The question of identity, who are you?

What defines you? What's special about you? Who or what are you trying to be?

The question of purpose, what are you for? What are you for? What are you going to pour your energy into this week?

What are you aiming for this week? What is success in your opinion? Knowledge, who knows you?

Who knows you? Who can you be completely open with? Who's allowed access into every single part of your life? Who can you be utterly vulnerable with and if you are that open and vulnerable, how are they going to treat you and authority? Who is in charge of you?

[ 27 : 04 ] Who's your master or maybe a better way to ask that question is who are you trying to impress? Whose opinion do you worry about? Whose voice do you listen to?

Now the reason these are all such searching questions is because they all have a definite answer. Now you might say well I don't think that's true Thomas and you might want to say well you know you ask me these questions I don't know I don't really think about it I'm not sure there is an answer but that's never true. For every single person these questions all have a definite answer and that's why they are such searching questions because we possibly don't even really want to have to think about them we're possibly scared to think about what the answers might be. You think you know whose opinion do I worry about? You think what am I turning to achieve with my life? Who am I anyway? These are really really searching questions.

What I want us to see as we close is that the answers that Jesus gives to these questions they are the answers that all of us long for. So many people are trying to answer these questions with a whole pile of stuff that is just going to disappoint. Jesus gives us the answers that we long for. So who are you? Where do you find your identity? Maybe it's in your job, maybe it's in your appearance, maybe it's in your relationships, maybe it's in where you live, maybe it's in your achievements, probably most likely of all it's in your mistakes and your regrets. A good way to ask yourself that question is to think you know what do you see when you look in the mirror? What are you going to see when you look in the mirror tomorrow morning? Will you see a worker ready for a new week, ready for a new day? Will you see you know a good looking person who's going to go out and try and impress people or do you see a failure who's probably going to muck up again today like you do most other days? Another good thing to ask yourself is pick a pick a memory that defines you. So just think back in your life, pick a memory that defines you, see what comes into your head. I'm pretty confident it'll be something negative for most of us. We tend to be hard on ourselves, we tend to think, we tend to ground our identity in our mistakes or in our failures and often if we do try to hang on to something positive it's to mask something negative.

We're all broken, we're all struggling, we're all insecure, we all feel weak, we all feel like we're a bit of a waste of space. In Jesus your identity is grounded in being a child of God.

That's what John 1.12 reveals to us, to all he believed in him, he gave the right to become children of God. If you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, when I ask the question who are you, the first, first answer that I want you to have in your heart is I am God's precious child.

[ 30 : 49 ] You might not feel like that, you probably won't feel like that, I actually don't care how you feel because this is a theological fact, God's precious child and that is a right that no one can ever take away from you. What are you for? In other words, where do you find your purpose? Where do you find what makes you feel like you've done an okay job in a day or in a week? Or put it a bit another way, what do you feel like you need to do this week? What duties do you need to fulfill? What do you feel like you need to perform well? Where do you feel like you need to get to in life in order to accomplish something positive? Maybe you think I've got to get good grades at school or I've got to climb the ladder at work or I need to get fitter, I need to get richer, I need to stay healthy, these are all okay aims to have I suppose but they're all temporary. In Jesus, in Jesus you are living this week for the Son of God who made you.

You are serving in His kingdom, you are investing for His eternity and you are making God Almighty smile because you're fulfilling His purposes, you're serving Him and you can do that in every single part of life from the way that you say good morning to somebody tomorrow morning all the way through to the greatest achievements of your life. You've got so much to offer for His kingdom, there's so much that you can do for Him because every moment that you live this week and for the rest of your life is part of His plan and part of His purpose. Every email you send, every conversation you have, every meal that you eat, everything that you do can be done for Him through Him and with Him. In fact even this week you can connect somebody else with their Creator, with Jesus and all you need to do is say come and see. It's amazing to be given a job by somebody important. Imagine how the people will feel this week who've been told to stand on guard when the Queen lies in St Giles or in Westminster Abbey later in the week. Imagine the people who are involved in appointing Liz Trass, the new Prime Minister. Imagine all the people who've been given jobs by somebody important. You think wow, wow, I've got purpose, I'm fulfilling an important role.

Well, following Jesus, the Creator, Sustainer and Ruler and Savior of the entire universe is saying to you I've got work for you. You can serve me. The one who in the beginning was the Word, who was with God, who was God, the one through whom all things were made, you can live for Him in everything that you do this week. Who knows you? The question of that knowledge about you, who knows you? Maybe a husband or a wife, maybe a parent, maybe a sibling, maybe a friend, maybe it feels like no one does. But it's never through that no one does because regardless of whether you've been following Jesus for decades or whether you're still not sure if you've taken that first step, it's a theological fact that Jesus knows you. He knows you. Every single detail of you,

He knows you and He still likes you. In fact, He loves you. And I think that's just amazing.

You feel so often you think, you know, the more people would know us, the more reasons they would find to not want to know us. Maybe this is the most ridiculous illustration that you've ever heard and I'm sorry if it is, but sometimes I think that humans are a bit like apples.

[ 35 : 19 ] You know, we all try to have a nice outer skin that's shiny and appealing. And then beneath that there's a fleshy bit that we hope is appealing and sweet and that all who get to know us will enjoy. But then right in the middle there's this core that's kind of unpleasant and jaggy and yucky and easily broken and that nobody really wants to go near. And we can feel like that, that yeah, on the outside we can make things good and then even beneath that we're all okay, but okay, if you get really in there to the core, it's not very nice. And that's why we allow very few people that kind of depth into our lives and we'll only do it to people who we really trust or to people who we know are stuck with us. Jesus knows you to your very core and he still loves you enough to die for you. And then lastly, who has authority over you? Who's in charge of your life? You might say me, well are you sure? Because in the week ahead are there people whose opinion you worry about?

Are there people who you really hope will be pleased with you? Are there people whose guidance you're going to need? Of course there is. Everybody has these things, has people like that in their lives. The key question though is who do we give ultimate authority to? And in Jesus, in Jesus, following Jesus, we give ultimate authority to the one who made us. We give ultimate authority to the one who is the light that humanity desperately needs. We give authority to the one who became flesh and dwelt among us. We give authority to the one who is full of grace and truth. Now that there is one of the most magnificent statements in the whole of scripture.

Jesus has authority and he's full of grace and truth. So often authority lies in the hands of merciless liars. Jesus has authority and he is never anything other than full of grace and full of truth. So yes, his truth means that sometimes he'll confront us with our brokenness and our neediness and the fact that we can't make it on our own. That's a good thing because that's the kind of truth that we need but alongside that truth is immeasurable, immeasurable grace.

Grace that will just take you in his arms, wash you clean, forgive you of every single stupid mistake that you've ever made. He has all the authority in the universe and he's full of grace and truth. These are all searching questions. I want to just leave you with just the fact that if you look for the answer to these questions in anything other than Jesus then you will never stop searching. But if you trust in him either for the first time or if you continue on trusting him and as his disciples then the search will be over and an amazing adventure will begin. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we seek you and we're so sorry for all the times we've gone seeking for answers in the wrong places but we are seeking you and longing for you and we pray that you'd come near to us all as we seek you and you this evening. Thank you for your amazing love.



[ 39 : 27 ] Thank you that you're so full of grace and truth. Thank you for everything that you are and everything that you've done for us. Amen. We're going to close singing together from Psalm 63 verses 1 to 8. These are words that do this express so powerfully what we've been trying to think about tonight. Recognizing that God alone is our God that we seek him with eagerness that we thirst for him in this dry and weary wilderness and it's a theological fact that whether we realize it or not all of us are thirsting for him as we battle on through life. So Murdo will lead us and we'll stand and sing these words as we close.