

Albert Eysink

Ten searching questions from God

Genesis 3:9 ... Jonah 4:1-4

Introduction¹

When you sing the hymn number 88 from the collection of "Spiritual Songs," as we just did, you will notice that there is a question in this song. When you yourself ask something, or when someone specifically asks anything from you, you will expect an answer from that person, or you will give an answer yourself. OK? You see, I ask a question, and there's a nod. Nice is that, it does work. But this song says, "Who, O God, loves like You?" The love of God is incomparable, we've figured that out. But where does this love come from? God is the Source, because He concerns Himself with us as believers. This is shown by the questions He asks.

I have ten questions for you, or rather 11. I don't have them, I have to say, but the Lord has them for you. Before they come to you now, they have come to me. God asks us all kinds of questions in His Word, and these questions need to be answered. Why does He ask them? Would He not know the answer? Certainly He knows the answers to all those questions. But the purpose of it is that we become aware of certain things!

¹ Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

1. The question to Adam

We read the first question in Genesis 3:9, where it says, Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" That seems easy enough, because this question was intended for Adam and Eve. But that question comes to me today and to you, brothers and sisters, young people. "Where are you?" A joker might say, I'm in the meeting. Yes, that's right. Glad you're here! Really. But the question, of course, is: "Where are we spiritually?" God is interested in where we are, on what timeline we are spiritually. The second word is "are". God is interested in our situation, and He is interested in you as a person, and also in me. Can you imagine that? There are 17 million people in the Netherlands, and God is interested in you and in me! He asks, "Where are you?" Each of us must answer that question. Where am I? Am I walking with God?

Or the very first question should actually be: "Do I really know the Lord Jesus?" Can I ask this in a community of believers? I once experienced that someone spoke for a thousand people, who had just sung the song: "It is well with my soul". And then the one who was to speak that evening asked, "Who hasn't sung this song?" But no one raised a finger. At that, the speaker said, "Then I'm not going to preach the gospel tonight, because there's no need to." Then, after a long silence, he said, "But perhaps it is necessary for that one person, who did not dare to lift his finger. To him I want to address a word anyway." That evening, a young man came to faith, and he called his father and said, "I have found the Lord Jesus Christ."

I am so glad, boys and girls, that you are here. Young people, I think it's fantastic and I really care. Why? Because the Lord Jesus is glad about it. But I would like to ask: Do you really know the Lord? How do you stand in your relation to Him? This is very important for those who have not yet accepted the Lord Jesus, but for us as believers it is also important. Brothers and sisters, where do we actually stand? It may be that we are asleep, and routinely go our way. We go to the meeting on Sunday morning, and also to the prayer meeting and the Bible reading during the week. All of that is possible. But still the danger lurks for me and for you and the question is: "Where are you?"

The Lord is interested in me and in you. We basically don't have to say anything at all, although He would like to hear an answer from us. He looks right through us; we can't fool Him. For all things are naked and open to Him with whom we have to do. So that is a question that comes to us very clearly. We can apply it to Adam and Eve, that is easy. But the Lord asks this question from me and from you, "Where do you stand in your spiritual life?"

Do we remember the moment when we came to know the Lord Jesus? Perhaps it happened in a gradual way. Fine, praise the Lord! But did we also grow in our life of faith? You and me, and all of us? And then we know how we may grow. The children know the song, "Read your Bible, pray every day, that you may grow." It's about listening to what God tells us in His Word, and talking to Him in prayer, so that we learn to know Him more in our lives. So that was the first question. I could say more about it, but I'm not going to.

2. The question to Cain

We find God's second question in Genesis 4:9-10, where it says, "Then the LORD said to Cain: Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And He said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."

We do know what happened to Abel. He was murdered by his brother Cain. That is terrible! Sinful man has been alienated from God (Adam), but he is an evildoer as well (Cain). But now take this question apart from its immediate context, and suppose the Lord asks you, "Where is your brother, or your sister?" Joseph showed a very different attitude in Genesis 37:16, where it says, "I am seeking my brothers." Do we do the same, brothers and sisters? Do we miss the brothers and sisters with whom we used to be together? And do we then pay attention to the question that goes with this, "What have you done?" Take that question to heart, without looking at the exact context. Wouldn't it be good to reconsider our individual history, to confess what we have done wrong, and to ask the Lord for His help and guidance?

3. The question to Hagar

We turn to the third question in Genesis 16:7-8. I do know that I am taking these questions a little out of context, I am aware of it. But these questions also come to us today from God's Word, just as the question came personally to Hagar at that time. We read here that the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Just very specifically, I'm filling in my own name now, "Albert, where have you come from, and where are you going?" Well, I come from a Christian family, that's for sure. It was all lived out to me, but I had to learn that I needed the Lord Jesus in a personal way. I really had to learn that I needed Him as my Savior and Lord. I had

to repent to God, and accept the Lord Jesus. The Bible says very clearly what we were as sinners, namely "children of wrath, dead in trespasses, without God in the world, without Christ and without hope in this world" (cf. Eph. 2). That is where I was coming from.

But now, since I know the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it precious to know that He Himself has said that He went to prepare a place for us in His Father's house, where there are many mansions? Then He also said: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). That is our final destination, with the Lord Jesus in the Father's house.

He has opened the way, for He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He is, as it says in Hebrews, the Author of our eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9). He is the One who has accomplished everything, and He is the Way to the Father. And to be with Christ, that is our glorious goal. Then we will see Him like He is: the One who has accomplished everything that was necessary for us to be saved from the eternal judgment of God. Then we will see Him: the One who once hung on the cross for us, in our place, as our Substitute.

"Where have you come from?" And, "Where are you going?" God is still asking these questions. I think, brothers and sisters, that we know intellectually that the Lord Jesus will return. We could name the chapters and verses (1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor. 15). We may be able to quote them as well. That's fine, but the question for me and for you is: Is this a living reality in our hearts? Are we living in the hope that the Lord Jesus is coming back soon. I trust for all of us that it will be so, that we have such a relationship with the Lord Jesus that we really long for Him. That we want to see the One who has accomplished everything for us on the cross of Calvary. Then we are on the right path, and then the Lord asks the following question.

4. The question to Abraham

I'm going to mention the next question, which we find in Genesis 18. This is about the fact that God promised Abraham a son, and that had become impossible from a human point of view. Then it says there in verse 14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Well, what do we say to this? Nothing, because no one has answered that question in Genesis 18. But for the Lord, really, nothing is too wonderful.

I hope that your hearts will answer in the affirmative, "Lord, for You nothing is too hard." I don't know you very well, but behind every face, so to speak, is its own

story. Some sit here with concerns, with difficulties, with sorrows. And then comes the question, "Would to God anything be too wonderful?" And then we may say: "Lord, for You nothing is too hard, You make the impossible come true." I think of Mark 9, which is a popular subject. There it is about someone with a deaf and dumb mind. Then the Lord comes down from the mountain, after some of the disciples have already tried to do something. And then that father comes to Christ and says, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit (...)." So I spoke to Your disciples, but they were unable to do anything. And then the Lord speaks just four words, "Bring him to Me."

Young people, parents, when we face impossible situations, difficult things, the Lord says something very simple: "Bring him to Me." Or, "bring it to Me." We may do that. For who loves us as He does? He listens to what is in our hearts. When we bring a so-called impossible situation to Him, He is there and He listens. That is how our Lord is. "Who loves like You?" "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden," He has said, "and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Impossible situations are God's possibilities. 'Would anything be too wonderful for the LORD?' Then sometimes you stand very embarrassed afterwards. Of course, it's not about me, but about what God does. The story I am telling you is true. There were 5000 Bibles in the harbor, and the only way to get them was to pay a bribe. We had prayed about it and said, "Lord, You know." And we get to the office and see a lot of people standing around. The president had fired the minister of finance, who was in charge of granting duty exemptions. The minister of defense had now been placed in this post, and he went through the offices and asked accountability from the officials why certain things were left unfinished. The official whom we had visited several times for these Bibles, and who had said, "You have to move some first, or you won't get them," now said, "We have been waiting for you for weeks for that letter about the import duty exemption."

Brothers and sisters, this is how the Lord works! Would anything be too miraculous for Him? Absolutely not! With Him all things are possible. Let us hold on to this. The Lord still performs miracles today. We have a God of miracles. Let us believe it.

5. The question to Moses

For the next question we turn to the book of Exodus. There, in chapter 4:1-2, it says the following: "Then Moses answered and said, But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, The LORD has not appeared to you. So the LORD said to him, What is that in your hand? And he said, A rod."

The Lord can also ask us today, "What do you have available in your hand?" Moses had a shepherd's staff in his hand and he had to go to Pharaoh, but he had objections over and over again. And then the Lord asked him, "What is that in your hand?" You know why I think this is so beautiful? If you look further down in this chapter, it says in verse 20, "Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand." Beautiful isn't it? The rod of Moses became the rod of God.

With an insignificant thing, God can do miracles. Later we see how Moses used his rod to the glory of God, as a tool in His service. What we have at our disposal, we must surrender to the Lord, and He will go to work with it.

Another example? We are all familiar with the story of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. There was a boy who had five loaves of bread and two fishes. His mother had given him these for his lunch. He went to the Lord Jesus, and do you know what he did? He gave them to the Lord Jesus. And with those five loaves of bread and those two little fish, the Lord went to work. And afterwards they were all hungry, weren't they? No, they weren't. They were all satisfied. Brothers and sisters, when we give what we have available to the Lord, He goes to work with it.

I remember the story of a sister, I think in East Berlin, who testified of her Lord and Savior. This was in the days when there were still two separate countries, East and West Germany. She testified to her neighbor, but she got terribly angry about this. That's why she started cursing. But later that same woman became ill, and the Christian went to her with a pan of soup. What do you have in your hand? Even if it is only a bowl of soup! This gave rise to her testimony being used and blessed by the Lord. What do you have in your hand? Give it into the hand of God, and He will use it for His glory. Even though we might think, This is not much anyway! But for Him nothing is impossible, as we have just seen. And what do you have in your hand? The Lord would like to use it to His honor and His glory.

6. Another question to Moses

We now turn to Exodus 14, which is about the crossing through the Red Sea. The Egyptians are after the Israelites, and then God tells them to go forward, after Moses had encouraged the people by saying, "Do not be afraid (...). The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." And the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:14-16).

My point is God's question, "*Why do you cry to Me?*" Moses was praying. Another translation says he was praying loudly. But sometimes the Lord says, "Stop praying now, you must move on. I would like to see your obedience." This is pretty clear, I think. It is also a simple lesson. When it becomes evident what we can and must do, the Lord would like us to go on and perform what He asks from us. I don't want to say too much about that. I have my hands full with that for myself. When the Lord tells me to do something, there may be plenty of objections – just like Moses had – but the Lord demands real obedience. From all of us.

7. The question to Joshua

We turn to the book of Joshua for the next question. Here we find a prayer from Joshua and the elders of Israel, after the defeat at Ai. The hearts of the people of Israel had melted with fear and become like water. Then we have in Joshua 7:10 ff. a command and a question on God's part: "So the LORD said to Joshua: Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned." So much for that.

I want to apply it freely. Joshua was praying and he had to find out what had happened among the people. Sometimes the Lord also asks us to find out certain things so that they can be put in order. Personally and as a community of believers, it is important that we pray for things that have happened in the past. But in doing so, the Lord may also ask us some questions: Is there something to settle with other brothers and sisters? Have we perhaps acted wrongly? Again, I'm not going to say much about this, but how nice it would be if people would be restored, if hearts would be brought back together to the Lord! Possibly with brothers and sisters from whom we are now separated. We may have to pray first, but the Lord will make it clear to us what we have to do.

8. The question to Solomon

I move on to the next question, this time asked of Solomon. It is written about this prince of peace in 1 Kings 3, "And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places. Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar." Here the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and He asked him the question, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:3-5).

Brethren, what should the Lord give us? Sisters, what can the Lord give you? Solomon, who walked in the ways of his father David, was off to a good start. You could say that. With a thousand burnt offerings he had glorified God and sought His favor. God's response is, "Now tell me what I shall give you." And then Solomon did not ask for material things. He asked for something very special, as we read in the following verses. And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:6-9).

What do we learn from this? We learn here that Solomon was very humble as a young man. He said he was limited in what he could do. He didn't know how to go out or come in. And then he asked for a wise heart to be able to judge God's people: "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart." Isn't that also a good example for ourselves of what we may ask from the Lord? Give that we pay attention to You, that we listen to Your Word. We can listen to many things in this world. There are many voices, including all kinds of Christian voices. You can hear things from all sides, and people want to talk to you. But here we read: "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart."

For Solomon it was a real matter of the heart, and that is exactly what it is about. Brothers and sisters: Is our relationship with the Lord a matter of the heart, not an outward routine? Do you see what I mean? I am not blaming anyone, I'm looking at my own heart. But God wants our hearts to be really involved in everything that concerns the Lord Jesus. How beautiful is this prayer: Give me then a discerning heart.

9. The question to Elijah

The next question God addressed to the prophet Elijah, as we read in 1 Kings 19:9-10. Here it says of Elijah after his journey as far as Horeb, the mountain of God: "And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah?"

So he said, I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Yes, Elijah was not so focused on God Himself here. I am glad that this story is in the Bible. Perhaps it is the same with us occasionally, when we are depressed and think that we are all alone? Or as Elijah felt, "I alone am left." But brothers and sisters, it is so important that we do not ask ourselves, "How do I feel about it?" But, "How does the Lord think about it?" And then the Lord looks with different eyes, very different eyes. We see this at the end of this story, where we read in verse 18, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

The Lord knew all the details of Elijah's situation. And you know, these are lessons for me too. I tell this honestly. Because you may think you know it all exactly, you think you can gauge everything. But it is so important, even when it comes to a service for the Lord, that we ask ourselves: "This is how I look at it, Lord, but how do You see it?" Or also, "I look at him or her this way, but how do You see him or her?" That is very different. How often did the Lord Jesus show that He saw things differently. In the story of the daughter of Jairus, someone came and said, "She has died; don't bother the Master anymore." But what did the Lord say? She is *sleeping*! He sees things differently, because He is above all things.

And so it is here. The LORD asks twice, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And then He shows how He thinks about it, and He gives him another command. As we read here in verse 15ff. "Then the LORD said to him: Go, return on your way, to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria (...)." The Lord does not write off the prophet. That's what I find so nice, that He doesn't do this. Because He knows exactly what Elijah has to go through, and He deals with him in a wonderful way, in a way that cannot be matched. Who, O God, loves like You?

10. The question to Jonah

I turn to another servant of the Lord for the final question, namely Jonah. We see in Jonah 4:1-4 that the prophet had a problem with God's kindness toward the Ninevites. God then asks a question in this conversation: "Then the LORD said, Is it right for you to be angry?" And in verse 9 this is repeated. "Then God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And the answer was in the affirmative: "It is right for me to be angry, even to death."

Jonah considered that wonderful tree to be far more important than all the people of Nineveh. And the fact that the tree withered was what excited him. Do you know what makes me happy? That Jonah remains silent after a final question on God's part in verses 10 and 11. There is no more protest from Jonah in verse 12, because it does not exist in the Bible. Jonah finally understands that he is wrong and should say nothing more. The Lord has done this with me several times as well. Maybe He doesn't need to ask you that, but I have been angry at times. And maybe you have too. But brothers and sisters, then He wants to bring us to the point where we become quiet and say in our hearts, "Amen, Lord, it's good!" That is not always easy.

Here God asks Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry?" That question may come to you or to me as well. So tell the Lord what is bothering you, like Jonah did. But one thing is certain, the Lord will bring you to the point of silence, sooner or later. The sooner we get used to the Lord's will, the better it is. There is a beautiful text in the book of Job: "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you" (Job 22:21).

An additional question

I'm sure you will get that question from God, at a later moment. You will get it from God Himself. And when you get that question, don't let Him have to say, "Why don't you answer it now?" Ten questions you have had, the eleventh you may get today, or tomorrow. And maybe I'll get it today or tomorrow, but it will certainly happen. And when we get it, let us answer it for His glory. For no one loves like He does!

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