

The Lamentation of a Spiritual Couch Potato

In episode 18 of my new series, *Questions With God*, I ask the question, “Does God really need us?” Maybe I’m wrong, but it seems like only a true (recovering) skeptic would ask a question like that. The fact that it’s a question I’ve pondered for most of my life isn’t something I’m super-proud of. But what’s the point of all this if we’re not honest, right?

The genesis of this question is easy for me: I didn’t want Him to need me, because that would mean I’d have to actually do stuff for Him, which was both scary and inconvenient. Most of us prefer religion over relationship, because religion is knowable and fits our current status quo. I know I often insinuate most “religious people” to be more conservative Christians, but honestly, some of the most negatively religious people I know are charismatics. Just because your focus is on the Holy Spirit doesn’t make you any less susceptible to closed-mindedness and spiritual apathy. Just because you feel like you’re enlightened doesn’t mean you actually are. The danger zone is when you think you’ve pretty much got this faith thing figured out and are simply waiting for everyone else around you to catch up. But I digress.

I have a sneaking suspicion that a lot of Christians carry a substantial amount of guilt for how little they actually do for God. I think performance is hard-wired into us at a young age—the most successful people are always the ones accomplishing the most. Therefore, we think that the most “successful” Christians are the ones doing the most for God’s kingdom. And the fact that we spend way more time on Netflix than we do advancing God’s kingdom in any meaningful way gnaws at us like spiritual migraine. So we throw money at others doing the stuff, or we promise ourselves that we will wake up

an hour early for devotions starting tomorrow, or we add a "God loves you" as we hand a dollar bill to the beggar at the stoplight. Sometimes this just spills out of our own love for Jesus and others, but if we're honest, sometimes it is to assuage our own guilt of pretty much being a spiritual couch potato.

So when this lazy Christian would crack open his Bible determined to get better at this Christian thing, I would read all these stories of God intervening in people's lives and inviting them on an adventure with Him. Moses got a burning bush. Paul got a bright light. Joseph got dreams. Abraham, Noah and Gideon all got personal invites. And it got me to thinking, *If God can just invade in on our lives whenever He wants to, what does He need us for? Does what I do or don't do even matter? If I don't go pray for that person, or do that kind gesture to this person, won't God just take care of the business He wants done some other way?*

It took me a very long time to realize that this question actually revealed more about me than it did God or how He runs His creation. I kept wrestling with a theological question that was born out of my own lack of love, empathy and compassion for people. The fact that I would even ask that question while looking at someone in need shows my own loveless heart. When I really examine this question, it's actually kind of comical, because what I'm really asking is "Does God even need us to love others?" Of course He doesn't, because He loves everyone perfectly. But "need" and "want" are two very different words. He doesn't need us to do anything, but He sure wants us to. And why does He want us to? Because us exercising love on His behalf demonstrates to others the love He has for them. But even more than that (because again, He's done it Himself in the past without using people) I think He wants us to engage with the world around us on His behalf for our sake as much as anyone else's. Without question, my faith has never felt more alive than the times I was showing

God's love to others.

I think God knows us far better than we know ourselves, and He is quite aware of our tendency to be selfish, self-centered lovers. But when your love for God is only ever focused on your own spiritual formation and growth, it's like only ever-working out your arms. Your biceps may be popping out of your shirt, but you look like a weirdo because the rest of your body has been neglected. I think a lot of the guilt we often feel for doing nothing for God's kingdom is simply our own spirit longing for more, like a body lacking nourishment longs for certain foods to get the vitamins and minerals it needs. The answer to this longing isn't going to be found in writing another check or buying another Christian self-help book. It can only be found doing the very thing your faith was crafted to do. Loving someone besides yourself.