



Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church
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What Does God Want?¹
John 12:20-26

Have you ever been in a situation, maybe at work or in some volunteer capacity, or even in a relationship, where you weren't sure exactly what the person you were dealing with wanted from you?

Do you ever find yourself in that situation in your relationship with God, not really sure what it means for you to follow Christ, or even what the Christian life is really all about?

Have you ever wondered exactly what it is that God wants from us? A wrong answer to this question can lead to disastrous consequences. Not understanding what God wants from us can lead us into the extremes of either legalism, where we try to earn our salvation by what we do, or libertinism, where anything goes as far as our behavior. Both of these are grave errors for believers. Both are spiritually unhealthy, and neither pleases God.

Gaines Dobbins, who taught for many years at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky often said, "If you ask the wrong question, you're going to get the wrong answer."²

So maybe rather than asking *what God wants from us*, we should ask, *what does God want?* It's a subtle, but very important difference.

The first question focuses more on ourselves than on God. We want God to tell us what He wants from us so we can see if we can fit it in to what we want to do with our lives.

The second question focuses on God, understanding that we must adjust our lives to Him and what He wants.

We come to this question in the midst of this series on *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. This morning, we're looking at John 12:20-26, a text that answers this question, at least in large part. Listen to what happened . . .

READ TEXT . . .

The Suffering Servant and His servants

These "Greeks" in this story were apparently God-fearing Gentiles—people who were attracted to the Jewish faith but were not ready to make a full conversion to it. They came to Philip asking to see Jesus. Philip told Andrew, and together they went and told Jesus.

That was on Sunday before Jesus would die on the cross on Friday.

¹ In this sermon series, I am relying heavily on Blackaby's ideas as presented in Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

² Blackaby and King, 18.

Jesus' response must have amazed His disciples, because over and over they had heard Him say things like "My hour has not yet come," or "My time has not yet come" (John 2:1-4; 7:3-9, 30; 8:20). But now He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23).³

Then he gave them a picture to help them understand what was about to happen—the analogy of a wheat kernel, that unless it "falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (12:24). He was saying, of course, that His coming death was necessary to give life to many. Here Jesus was drawing on the Suffering Servant imagery of Isaiah 53.

But then He turned the analogy on those who would serve Him and follow Him—including us! Anyone who loves their life (in the sense of self-preservation and self-will being more important than anything else) will actually lose it, while the one who hates his or her life in this world (the one that realizes that God's rule is more important than one's own life) will keep it for eternal life (12:25).

Then Jesus made this declaration about those who would be His servants:

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me" (12:26).

In other words, *Jesus was stressing that God wants servants who will yield themselves completely to Him.*

What does God want?

When we look at this text and others in terms of experiencing God and knowing and doing His will, we see something of what God wants.

God wants servants who will yield themselves completely to Him in loyal love. That involves at least three things.

First, *God wants a relationship with us that's characterized by loyal love.*

As I've stressed earlier in this series of sermons, eternal life is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It's knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3).

A key characteristic of this relationship is *loyal love*. In the Old Testament, time and time again we read about God's loyal covenant love, a love that His covenant promises to His people embodied and that His faithful deliverance of and provision for His people expressed. The NIV usually translates the Hebrew word simply as "love" or "mercy." The KJV usually translates it as "mercy" or "loving kindness." The NASB often renders it as "lovingkindness." My favorite translation of the word is that most often used by the RSV, the NRSV, and the ESV—"steadfast love." Because God loves us with this kind of love, He wants us to relate to Him in a similar kind of self-giving *loyal love*.

Jesus says in our text that if we're serving Him, we'll be following Him, and where He is we will be.

In 2 Samuel 15:21, we read how when King David was fleeing from Jerusalem when his treacherous son Absalom tried to overthrow him, David told Ittai the Gittite, who had only recently come to Jerusalem and cast his lot with David as his king, to go back and stay with

³ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

Absalom. But Ittai declared his loyalty to David, saying, “Wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.”

Isn't that what Jesus wants from us?

We experience God's steadfast love; He desires our loyal love!

But that's not all. *God also wants us to have a moldable, teachable spirit.*

Philip and Andrew didn't know what to do with those Greeks who came looking for Jesus. So they did exactly what they should have done—they told Jesus so He could respond as He wanted to. Jesus then showed them how the Greeks' seeking Him related to His mission. It was a teachable moment, and Jesus used it to mold Philip and Andrew for their later mission.

Blackaby points us to the passage we read earlier in our service today, Jeremiah 18:1-10, about the potter and the clay, and reminds us that God wants us to be as moldable in His hand as the clay is in the potter's!⁴

You see, for us to become the servants God wants us to be, we must be willing for Him to mold us into what He wants us to be. Sometimes that involves pain and difficulty. Sometimes it involves being humbled. Sometimes it involves being stretched.

I remember years ago hearing Dr. Charles Allen give his testimony as he preached in chapel at Campbell. As he talked, he had two pencils in one hand and a rubber band in the other. As he'd tell about something he and his wife went through in their experience in the ministry and on the mission field, he'd wrap the rubber band around the pencils and pull on it and say, “And He stretched us.”

He had done that several times, and as he told about a particularly challenging experience, he wrapped the rubber band around the pencils for what was now about the fifth time and pulled on it, saying, “And He stretched us again—” and the rubber band broke. And then Dr. Allen continued, “And we broke. But then He had us right where He wanted us, because now He could put us back together like He wanted us, so He could use us even better.”

God wants us to be open to Him—to be teachable, moldable, stretchable—so He can fashion us into the vessel He wants us to be, the vessel He can use in the work of His kingdom.

And even when that process is painful and the experience is excruciating, He always does it in love, making us over into the image of Jesus Christ.

Finally, *God wants us to be available vessels for His use.*

He wants us to give up ourselves and our lives to Him completely. He wants Him and His purpose to be what's most important to us. He wants us to be where Jesus is, so that just as Jesus was when He was here on this earth, we will always be at the Father's disposal for His purposes.

In 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Paul says that just as a large house has many vessels designed for various uses, so we are to be vessels that are prepared for the Master's use.

And that really is the key, isn't it—for *His* use?

I know I've said this so many times before, but hear this clearly again this morning: *God does not want us to do some great thing for Him; He wants us simply to be at His disposal so He can do great things through us!* We are to be *His* servants, *His* instruments, *His* vessels!

And we're to make ourselves *available* to Him.

⁴ Blackaby and King, 25-26.

Our response

So what does God want? *Servants who will yield themselves completely to Him in loyal love.* It's just that simple.

And we don't have to be great, extraordinary people for God to use us.

The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody was a simple, ordinary, uneducated shoe salesman. Early one morning, he and some friends had gathered in a hay field for a prayer meeting. In that time together, a man named Henry Varley said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him."

These words moved Moody deeply. Later he had the opportunity to hear the great C. H. Spurgeon preach. One of Moody's biographers described his response this way:

"The world had yet to see! With and for and through and in! A man!" Varley meant any man! Varley didn't say he had to be educated, or brilliant, or anything else! Just *a man!* Well, by the Holy Spirit in him, he'd be *one* of those men. And then suddenly, in that high gallery, he saw something he'd never realized before—it was not Mr. Spurgeon, after all, who was doing that work; it was God. And if God could use Mr. Spurgeon, why should He not use the rest of us, and why should we not all just lay ourselves at the Master's feet, and say to Him, "Send me! Use me!"⁵

When we yield to God and adjust our lives to Him, living in a relationship of loyal love, He will work in and through us and our church in ways we have never even dreamed!

And that, my brothers and sisters, is *what God wants!*

†MEG

⁵ Blackaby and King, 28-29.