





What Shall I Do?

This simple question found repeatedly in the scriptures can help us determine God's will for us.

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In the scriptures we find many stories of people who asked an important question: “What shall I do?” King Lamoni’s father asked this question of Aaron the missionary (see Alma 22:15); a multitude in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost asked it of Peter and the Apostles (see Acts 2:37); and a rich young ruler asked it of the Savior (see Luke 18:18). What can we learn from this question and those who asked it?

First, we can learn from what has led people to ask this question. Second, we can learn from the various responses to the question. And perhaps most important, we can reflect on how asking, “What shall I do?” and similar questions can be valuable in our own lives.

Willing to Learn

Those who asked the question “What shall I do?” share several significant characteristics. First, they listened to the preaching of the gospel. For example, before the people asked John the Baptist, “What shall we do?” they listened to his preaching (see Luke 3:3–14). And before King Lamoni’s father asked, “What shall I do that I may have . . . eternal life?” (Alma 22:15), he listened intently to Aaron, who “did expound unto him the scriptures” (verse 13). Listening to the word of God was also important when Peter and the Apostles preached to the people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Through the Spirit, Peter was able to deliver his message

to people who spoke many different languages, and he testified that Jesus is the resurrected Christ. The people “were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

A desire to do one’s duty is another important aspect of learning what to do. In some cases, a new calling or ordination can prompt people to better learn their duty. Several sections in the Doctrine and Covenants came forth because a person wanted to know his or her duty and inquired of the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith. For example, “three of the Whitmer sons, each having

received a testimony . . . , became deeply concerned over the matter of their individual duty” (D&C 14, section introduction). In response to their concern, Joseph Smith received sections 14, 15, and 16 of the Doctrine and Covenants.¹

In addition, humility is essential to seeking direction. It takes a person with a humble heart to ask the question “What shall I do?” When Alma and Amulek preached to “a great multitude” of Zoramites who “were poor in heart,” Alma observed that “their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word” (Alma 32:4, 6).

Receiving an Answer

Often the response to the query “What shall I do?” is simply to repent. Aaron instructed the father of King Lamoni to “repent of all [his] sins, and [to] bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that [he should] receive” (Alma 22:16). Similarly, Peter told his audience on the day of Pentecost to “repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38).

However, responses to the question “What shall I do?” are not always the same. John the Baptist answered this question in three different ways to three different groups of people (see Luke 3:11–14). The Savior gave different counsel to the rich young ruler than He did to the lawyer who tempted him (see Luke 18:18–23;

10:25–28). But in each case the individuals seeking answers were instructed to take a specific action that almost always involved making changes in their lives that demonstrated their obedience to God.

Asking with Real Intent

There are many ways we can learn what God would have us do. Certainly we can listen more diligently to the preaching of the word, strive to fulfill our duties, and humble ourselves. And as President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has taught, we can and should directly ask of the Lord, “What shall I do?” President Eyring said:

“If you have had trouble getting answers to your prayers, try asking today, ‘What is there that you would have me to do?’

“That prayer will be answered if you are sincere and if you listen like a little child, with real intent to act.”²

As Latter-day Saints, we have made covenants to do God’s will. Thus, each of us has the responsibility to seek to know what God would have us do. As we feast on the words of Christ, seek to do our duty, and humble ourselves, revelation will come. We can and must ask the question “What shall I do?” ■

NOTES

1. See also Doctrine and Covenants 23; 51; 53; 54; 66; 72; 75; 108.
2. Henry B. Eyring, “Choose to Be Good” (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 12, 1991), 6–7, speeches.byu.edu.

