

What Do I Know?

John 9:1-41

28 December, 2025

I am in awe of people who are truly, honestly, curious.

One of my best friends in university was a guy named James. James was a political science major, with the intent of becoming a journalist. I can't imagine a person who was better suited to journalism because he couldn't help himself asking questions. Not just superficial questions either. Give James ten minutes with someone, and he would have them completely engaged in sharing some kind of story or idea with him. Then he would ask more questions, drawing out the best nuggets from people.

He did this with everyone. Politicians, professors, millionaires and addicts living rough on the street. I was friends with him for years before I managed to put my finger on what made him so affable, personable, and attractive to people from all walks of life.

James was a curious man. If someone told him that curiosity killed the cat, he would want to know how the cat got on Mars in the first place. He genuinely wanted to understand someone else's point of view.

I would love to be naturally curious. I'm not. I have to work to overcome my natural preference for what I already think I know.

Sure, curiosity can be a problem. Despite what you may have heard, there are some dumb questions.

Can I drink this smoothie through a straw with my nose?

How strong is this electric fence?

How instant is instant when it comes to Crazy Glue and skin?

All questions I have heard asked. By others. Allegedly.

Curiosity without wisdom can lead us to consider all manner of weird and unhelpful ideas alongside what is actually true.

Yet wise curiosity is also the foundation of flexible thinking, of teachability, and growth. Discerning between the two is incredibly important! Especially for our friendly kittens, for whom curiosity is so weirdly dangerous!

The hero of our story today is such a person. He is known only by description, but what a description! He moves from “the man who was born blind” to “the man who used to be blind.” Talk about a dynamic character arc!

His audience has also changed drastically. Where before his voice would only be used for begging, he now talks to crowds, to temple magistrates, to God himself! What is remarkable to me is how he talks about his experience; he relates the mechanics of his healing, he states clearly what he does and does not know, he winds up making a profound argument that traps the Pharisees (experts of the law!), and ends with a humble question that leads to worship of God made flesh, who by the way, *he can see!* This, I suggest, is what wise curiosity looks like. He asks good questions, neither overstates, nor understates his knowledge and his need.

The Pharisees, by contrast, demonstrate a remarkable lack of curiosity. They both overstate their knowledge (we *know* this man is a sinner!) and understate their knowledge (we *don't even know* where this man is from!). Their questions do not lead to enlightenment because they are not looking to learn, they are looking to confirm. The result is that their character arc is completely flat.

The Pharisees think they have it all figured out; they know what needs to happen for them to achieve their desired outcome. They cannot fathom that someone as lowly as a beggar (note, now former beggar!) could possibly have anything to teach them. Because of their rock-hard attitude, they cannot learn new things. They miss out on two profound things:

1. This should have been a celebration of the glory of God! They have just seen one of their countrymen freed from a devastating condition!
2. They miss out on seeing the glory of God in God made flesh, walking and living among them!

Even worse, their assumptions also cause others to miss out on these things! The ideology of the Pharisees has made them brittle, not strong. Like over-tempered steel, they are sharp and cutting, but also easily threatened and broken. So they stop others from celebrating what they cannot comprehend. Stephen Reynolds once said, “When what we think we know tramples on another’s joy, it is wrong.”

The Men’s Study on Thursday mornings just finished Philip Yancey’s *What’s So Amazing About Grace*. This quote stood out to me: “The only stipulation is that they oughtn’t to come [to church] under false pretenses.”¹

¹ Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, p. 279, (quoting Harold Frederic in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*).

In our study group, we talked about what it looks like to come to an encounter under false pretenses. I think that it means to come with an agenda, to change others while not being willing to be changed. It is a hardness of mind, an unreasonable commitment to our opinion, a posture of hostility towards other ideas. The opposite of false pretenses is authenticity. Authenticity is an attitude of wise curiosity, asking questions, and willingness to change.

It put an image in my mind. A rocky cliff, and a sandy beach, side by side. The same waves pound relentlessly against each one. The rocky cliff remains only minutely changed and stubbornly defies all the power of the sea to change it. The sandy beach, however, shifts with every flow in and out. It is constantly renewed, constantly changed, and constantly teaming with life because the waves can penetrate it, bringing nutrients, critters, and refining.

Another way to think about this is by comparing mindsets between a growth mindset and fixed mindset.

A growth mindset embraces challenges, persists when things are hard, learns from criticism, is inspired by other's success, and sees change as an opportunity. Can you see the man who used to be blind in this list?

On the other hand, a fixed mindset avoids challenges, quits easily, reacts to criticism with defensiveness and justification, is threatened by other's success, and sees change as threatening. Can you picture the pharisees in this mindset?

I think that one of the most subtle traps of our western world is how much access many of us have to the things we both need and want. This abundance tends to push us towards a fixed mindset. Where someone who does not have enough food, or shelter, change is not only good, but something to actively seek after. For those who have an abundance, change is threatening.

Paul clearly favours one approach over the other:

“My sacred family members, when I came among you to tell you about Creator’s mysterious ways, I did not use big words or high-sounding wisdom. For I decided not to know anything while I was with you except about Creator Sets Free (Jesus), the Chosen One – and his death on the cross. I came to you as a weak human being in fear and trembling. I did not come with strong words or great wisdom, but with the Spirit showing his power in my weakness.”²

This puts many of us in an awkward position – we become like the pharisees. We justify, we ask questions only to confirm what we already know, we seek control over the status quo. We close our eyes to any ideas not our own, and to the need of others around us. We become, like the

² 1 Cor. 2:1-4, FNV.

Pharisees, blind to what God asks us to change. What don't we do? Ask genuine questions, engage in relationships with the hope of being changed.

What do I know? I find myself increasingly relating to Paul. The older I get the less I know for certain. I know that we always enter a new year blind. In our story, no one knows where Jesus can be found, and neither do we. Neither do we know what experiences and events will take place.

One other thing I know – Jesus is already there and knows exactly where each one of us will be. The Pharisees couldn't wait to get rid of the man who was challenging their understanding so effectively, but our story tells us that Jesus couldn't wait to find him, the excommunicated, curious, man who used to be blind. Jesus already wanders the pathways of the future, encountering us, preparing us, being with us. What kind of sense does it make to determine our plans, then put our heads down and blindly push through without consideration? This is the spiritual equivalent of taking on a task like pinning a tail on a donkey, then blindfolding ourselves, and simply marching forward.

Better to be able to see and make adjustments to our course as we aim to give a poor donkey a tail.

Better by far to be wisely curious, to seek the wisdom of someone who knows more than I do, who already walks the future.

How do we apply this idea? Here is confession time: remember that I started with the admission that I am not a naturally curious person. I have ideas that have helped me rather than solutions. So with humility, I share these in the hope that something here is helpful.

First, identify your hopes and expectations. We all have them. We also rarely take the time to articulate them. This is step one. I find that this is helpful to do in writing, and even better to do it with a partner.

Step two is "Hold your hopes and expectations with open hands."

Step two is harder, because the universe cares not one atom what my hopes are, let alone what I expect to happen! Things will happen. When they do:

Embrace the challenge: when we feel the struggle, be like my friend James: become curious. Why is this getting harder? Is it because it takes hard work to change, or because circumstances around me have rendered my expectations unreasonable?

Value, even actively seek, feedback: When I read scripture, when I pray, when I talk openly with friends and colleagues, I am actively seeking God's feedback on my life, my choices, my expectations, and my hopes. Do you believe that? Some of them, God is validating, some of

them God is re-shaping. It takes time with God to figure out which is which. Remember (both in receiving and giving feedback!), honest feedback creates inspiration rather than validation!

Finally, embrace change. Friends, nothing stays the same. And that is a good thing.