

Great *Question*



Great leaders ask great questions. During His ministry on earth, Jesus asked about three times more questions than He answered. His questions still have the power to pull us out of our comfort, out of our overconfidence, out of our settledness in our world and into greater knowledge of His Kingdom. Jesus' questions can shake us up and help to reset our lives.

GREAT QUESTION • Luke 6:43–49 • Jennifer Holz • July 7, 2019

Today we begin a series that will take us through the rest of the summer. We're calling it *Great Question*. Jesus was a master of words. He was good at asking powerful questions, telling stories and providing pictures and images that grew one's imaginative capacities. A good question can spark new ideas, reframe a situation, push us beyond the surface of things. A great question can be powerful because it can open up vulnerability and give us a new perspective.

Open your Bibles to Luke 6:43–49. Let's start with our first question. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

As a parent, I always feel a bit desperate for good questions to ask my kids at the end of the day. Maybe you feel it too as a parent or grandparent, or as an aunt or uncle. I want to know that they are learning and growing. So how can I engage them, get inside their hearts and minds? I learned pretty quickly that the question, "So, what did you learn today?" or "How was your day?" are total nonstarters. I get a blank look. A "nothing" or "I don't know" or a "one word answer: "fine" or "good." When Henry was in kindergarten, he brought a little container home that he had made in art class. It's pretty simple, but inside was this treasure trove of dinner questions. And for the last seven years we have kept this in the cupboard above our kitchen table. Whenever we are at a loss for conversation, the container comes down, and everyone gets to pick a question. Here are some examples:

- If you could change something about today, what would it be?
 - What made you happy today?
 - Pick a food on your dinner plate, and then tell us about something you saw today that starts with the same letter.
 - Tell me a story about something that happened today. Then make up a story. I'll try to guess which story is true.
- These are great questions, even for adults. It's not just kids who need good questions today.

Over the next six weeks we are pondering six questions that Jesus asks. Maybe you can write each one down each week and put them in a container near your kitchen table. Pull one out occasionally for your dinner group. Here's today's question: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' but don't do what I say?" Great question! Why do I do that? Let's start with where we are in the Gospel of Luke. This question comes at the end of what is known in Luke as

"the sermon on the plain." We are told that Jesus came down from the mountain where He had been praying and stood on a 'level place.' A crowd surrounded Him. In that crowd were His disciples (whom He had just appointed), and a great number of people from all over the region. We are told that they have come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. The crowd was pressing on Him to touch Him so they could be healed. There was power, we are told, coming from Jesus. He was healing them. It's probably a chaotic situation. I'm sure it's loud and disorganized. And in the midst of all this He looks at His disciples, and He begins to teach them. In this section of Luke's Gospel there are several questions Jesus asks, and we learn that Jesus' teaching style is to teach and ask, teach and ask, teach and ask. He wants them engaged personally and not just listening to abstract concepts. His style is very interactive. He doesn't lecture, He engages. Here are some of his questions leading up to our passage:

- "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?"
- "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?"
- "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Jesus ends His sermon with what we just read today. Let's explore our passage for the day.

Jesus approaches our question for today from nature, with agriculture, with fruit trees. How many of you have a fruit tree growing in your yard? Or grew up with a fruit tree? We lived downtown for six years, but never knew we had a fruit tree in our yard until the summer right before we moved. Peaches appeared on this tree in our driveway. Who knew? Jesus begins by stating the obvious: A good tree bears good fruit. And a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree will not bear bad fruit. And a bad tree will not bear good fruit. Healthy fruit comes from healthy trees. Rotten fruit indicates the tree is not good. We all know that if we want to pick a fig, we don't go looking for a thorn bush. And if we want grapes, we don't find them in a briar bush. That translates across the fruit family: apples come from apple trees. Oranges come from orange trees. The fruit is consistent with the tree. When we find good fruit on a tree, it's beautiful. The tree is fulfilling its purpose and living up to what it was created to be. Jesus then compares that to a man, a human being. Good things come from a good man. Evil things come from an evil man. The same principle applies: what you are will be seen in the fruit you bear. Jesus finishes by saying, "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." In other words: your words are an indicator of the fruit you are bearing because your words reveal what is filling your heart.

Then comes our question for today: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" If the mouth is supposed to reveal what is in the heart (as we've just agreed is the case), then how is it that your mouth can speak one thing and your life reveals something else? How can this be? An apple tree can't deviate from what it is. It cannot bear oranges. A healthy tree will produce healthy fruit. Nature is consistent. So how is it that the crown of creation, humanity itself, has the ability to break itself from its disposition, from its reality? How can it dis-

connect from itself saying one thing and doing another? How is it that I can speak the name of “Jesus,” call Him “Lord and Savior” and my life can be a mess of disobedience, inconsistencies and treating my neighbor like they are my enemy? And to be clear, we have our good moments where we show kindness, love and grace. But I flip back and forth, and I’m guessing you do too. Why do we do that? Wow, Jesus. Great question! Now when the seed of a great question is planted, I suppose we have a couple options. We can say, “Wow—great question. I should really think about that.” But life is busy. There are other urgent or distracting things that get my attention, and eventually the question slips off my radar. Or we can say, “That’s a great question. I know at least three people who need to answer that question. I’m going to send it to them.” Or, “Great question. I’m going to take time to think about it—in fact I’m going to carve out time right now to say something about that.” And we do it; we allow the richness of the question to enter our hearts and we make space to engage it.

Step with me back into Luke’s gospel for just a moment. Let’s make sure this question is indeed for us. Let’s be clear that this question is worth our time. Up to this point in Luke chapter 6, only two people have called Jesus “Lord” so far: Peter and the man with leprosy. So is Jesus just talking to these two individuals? Maybe, but not likely. Peter calls Jesus “Lord” in the same breath that he acknowledges that he is a sinful man. And the man with leprosy calls Jesus “Lord” knowing that Jesus can heal him. The Scribes and Pharisees have not claimed Jesus as Lord, so it’s certainly not directed at them. We are told that Jesus is talking directly to His disciples at this point. But 11 of them haven’t called him “Lord” yet. So, who is Jesus talking to? Jesus seems to be anticipating the reality that when we call Him “Lord,” we will all face this dilemma. We all have the capacity to call Jesus “Lord” and then not let the seeds of His Lordship grow in our hearts. Yikes! This question is for us, and if we stop to engage it, this question can help cultivate a richness of soil in our hearts. Why do you call me “Lord, Lord” and do not do what I say? Where do I even start with answering that?

This is the discipleship dilemma. The Apostle Paul goes straight at it writing, “what I want to do, I don’t do. And what I don’t want to do, I do” (Romans 7). Even Paul, the apostle, wrestles with this reality. There are two natures at work in us, Paul writes—the new nature and the old nature. And there is a battle between them. We are both saved and being saved. Our salvation is secure, and it’s also a journey of obedience and transformation. Why don’t I do what Jesus says? Let’s list out the things Jesus has just taught the disciples. These are some very challenging commands. Nothing He tells them is easy:

- Love your enemies.
- Do good to those who hate you.
- Bless those who curse you.
- Pray for those who mistreat you.
- Lend to your enemy without expecting anything back.
- Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.
- Do not judge. Do not condemn.
- Forgive.
- Take the plank out of your own eye before you address the speck in your brother’s eye.

The simple answer to why I don’t do these things, perhaps, is that “these things are hard.” I’m not sure I can do these things. In fact, I’m not sure I even want to do these things. I don’t want to spend an ounce of energy on someone who can’t stand me. And I certainly don’t have the energy to examine the plank in my eye, because it might mean I have to do something about it. Who’s got time for that! Desire, time, the urgency of life, busy-ness—lots of reasons!

But Jesus asks the question, I believe, not because He wants to motivate us into expending more energy to simply “try harder.” We’ve all played that game. We are probably playing it today in some area of our lives. I don’t think Jesus asks this question with a hard and disappointed look in His eye, wondering “when the heck are you all going to get it together?!” I think (and this is me) He asks it with a light in His eye, as if He has a secret that He’s dying to share. Jesus throws out the question to start a conversation, a conversation that has transformational possibility. He’s asking us to make space to engage that question with Him. Taking the question to heart, answering it with honesty, humility and vulnerability can open the door to a meaningful moment full of potential. Will we respond?

Then Jesus shifts to a different visual comparison. Are you still tracking? The metaphor moves from fruit trees to houses. From gardening to building. From nature to nurture. Two houses. One with a strong foundation. One with no foundation. What are you building in your life? Jesus indicates that we are all building something. But are we building something that lasts, or something that will fall apart at the slightest threat? A man builds a house. He digs deep and lays the foundation on rock. A flood comes, a massive flood, but the house doesn’t even shake. It is well built. Another man builds a house on the ground. He doesn’t bother with a foundation. The same flood comes, a massive flood, and the house collapses, total destruction. Nothing left. What are you building? Jesus is clear about the meaning of the images: Every time you hear the Word of God and don’t put it into practice, you are building a house without a foundation. When the storm comes, it will not survive. It will collapse into complete destruction. Why would you even bother building that house? But when you hear the Word of God and practice it, the shovel goes in the earth and the foundation begins to form.

When I was in my 20s, a small film debuted at the little independent theater down the road from where I was living in Western Massachusetts. The film was “Strictly Ballroom.” I saw it several times; I loved it. Now, it’s satire, so let me just say that. It’s Australian, so there are thick accents. But the point is clear as it often is in parody. It’s about a young Spanish-speaking immigrant woman whose family is living in Australia. Fran wants to be a dancer, and enrolls at a little Australian studio where it’s quickly determined that she’s better at mopping the floors for the real dancers. She’s awkward, she’s stiff and it is quickly decided that Fran will always be a beginner. But, of course, there is much more to Fran than meets the eye. On the other hand, Australian ballroom king Scott Hastings is “strictly ballroom.” He is next in line to win the Pan Pacific Grand Prix. He is so good all he has to do is show up. He

is highly technical, his steps are perfection. But something is off in Scott's rhythm—he has a growing awareness that he has entirely missed something about the dance. He has become hollow, disconnected, disengaged and is losing his edge. He starts dancing outside the lines, making up his own steps and throwing the entire dance federation into absolute chaos. In short, he's sabotaging himself. One simply does not dance non-federation steps and expect to win. Throughout the entire movie, Scott never notices Fran even though she's there every day. Why would he? He's the king. She's nothing, only a beginner. But on the night that Scott finally notices Fran, he is surprised to see that she is also making up her own steps. He pauses, he stops. For one brief moment, Scott stops obsessing over his own self-absorbed life crisis. For the first time in the film he sees someone else. And in that momentary pause, he makes a choice. He chooses to respond to her. From that moment, the movie takes a completely different turn. You can probably figure out where the film goes. It's a fun movie, a romantic comedy that makes fun of itself. Mind you, it's not rated G. It's PG. (I feel like I have to say that since I live with an editor at pluggedin.com.) Here's the thing: "Strictly Ballroom" is a silly love story, but it's also a story about the importance of being responsive. It's about taking a breath, hitting pause, noticing that your life is not the only thing happening in the room. And it's about letting someone else ask the important questions.

Jesus asks a lot of questions. They are not are not always easy to answer, but responding is the point. Jesus' questions are always invitations to respond. They are invitations to enter into relationship with the one who created you, and loves you, and is the only one who can heal the gap between mouth and heart. *You want to be a good tree, and bear good fruit? You want to build a strong house with a deep foundation?* In John chapter 15, Jesus revisits the theme of fruitfulness. He says "apart from me, you can do nothing." "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4) There is no lasting fruit, and no eternal rock to build on apart from the Lord. Here's the point: When we call Jesus "Lord," we are saying the truest thing that can be said in this world. Jesus is Lord. Over all. Apart from him, there is nothing. So, why do we call Jesus "Lord" and do not do what he says? That's a great starting point for your conversation with Jesus today. Will you pause today, take a breath, engage the question and put your shovel in the ground?

Those who have trusted Jesus with their lives for centuries have found that the Lord is not only a trustworthy conversation partner, but a firm foundation on which to build a life.

"Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.
Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken." Psalm 62:1–2

When Jesus asks a question, the best response is to respond. The question is before us. And I suppose the only question left today is—how will you respond? Amen.

STUDY GUIDE

GREAT QUESTION • "What Is Lord?"

Luke 6:43–49

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 6:43–49.

- 1) Reread verse 46. The old saying goes: "Actions speak louder than words." When have you experienced this to be true in your own life?
- 2) Does this old saying have any significance for us as we continue to grow in faith?
- 3) Reread verses 47–48. When have you been able to put Jesus' words into practice in a way that was like establishing a firm foundation?
- 4) Reread verse 49. Do you have a story about a time when you were more vulnerable to the storms of life because you were ignoring Jesus' words?
- 5) Reread verse 45. What does your speech indicate about you? What percent of your speech is negative or critical? What percent is encouraging or life-giving?
- 6) How does the question in verse 46 challenge you to grow in your knowledge of Christ's Kingdom?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Jesus has a lot to say about loving our neighbors and those who persecute us. What does Jesus' challenge to us in this passage mean for our understanding of how we should relate to our neighbors?

IN: Connect with Each Other

As you think about what it will look like to put Jesus' words into action in the coming week, pray for those you will interact with. Pray that they will see Jesus through your actions.