

Questions
JESUS
asked





Questions JESUS asked

Conversations that change everything

This series looks at six questions Jesus asked over the course of his ministry. It examines how each question drew people into engaging with him and discovering the new life they could have through a deeper relationship with him.

Week 1: “What do you want?” John 1:35-42

Week 2: “Who do you say I am?” Mark 8:27-30

Week 3: “Why are you so afraid?” Mark 4:35-41

Week 4: “Do you want to get well?” John 5:1-9

Week 5: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’,
and not do what I say?” Luke 6:46-49

Week 6: “Do you love me?” John 21:15-19



Overview



Jesus asked a lot of questions. Aside from his teaching and miracles, much of his ministry happened through simply meeting people and talking to them. The gospels record over three hundred questions as part of these encounters. It wasn't that Jesus lacked knowledge or was naturally inquisitive. He asked them because he wanted people to be drawn into relationship with him and to awaken them to the possibility of discovering deeper meaning. His questions were invitations to see themselves and envision God in a new way.

In this series we will look at six of those questions, each of which unveil something different about how Jesus met people where they were but held out the offer of so much more: awakening longing, inviting faith, confronting fear, restoring hope, challenging integrity and renewing love. Together they comprise a journey of the heart, mind and soul further into the fullness of life that Jesus came to offer.

Each session we will examine how Jesus engaged with those around him and used questions as a way of opening them up to seeing things differently. We will think about the response we would make to each question and how we might change and grow as a result. And since people in general today still have times when they wonder about the meaning of life and whether there is a place for faith in it, we will also consider how we listen and respond in the conversations we have with others, all of which have the potential to lead them into knowing Jesus more.

What other people have said:

“When Jesus asks a question, it’s never to find out something He doesn’t know – it’s to open a space where we can discover something about ourselves.”

N.T. Wright

“Jesus does not quiz us; He converses with us. His questions are not tests but doors.”

Rowan Williams

“Every question Jesus asks is a call to relationship. He doesn’t interrogate; He draws us in.”

Henri Nouwen

“Jesus asks questions almost as often as he gives answers. His questions are not rhetorical flourishes - they are invitations to transformation.”

Douglas Estes

“To be questioned by Christ is to be known, and to be known is to be loved.”

Madeleine Engel



Week 1: “What do you want?”

Jesus invites us to get to know him

? Opening question

When someone asks you a question, are you pleased because they are interested in what you think or worried that you won't know how to answer?

👋 Introduction

The first recorded words of Jesus in John's gospel are the question “What do you want?” The scene is somewhere near Bethany beyond the Jordan, the place where John the Baptist baptised people. Jesus has just walked past John and two of his disciples. When John points Jesus out to them, they go after him, prompting Jesus to turn round and ask what they want - one of those questions to which you can give a straightforward reply but actually probes much deeper.

This session explores whether the first thing needed to become a follower is to know what you are looking for. We are then invited to pause and ask ourselves what we want from Jesus today, so that in being honest about our own spiritual needs we are in a better position to help others connect with theirs.

📖 Read John 1:35-42

💬 Discussion

? Why do you think Jesus began with a question instead of a statement or invitation?

- ? How did his question shape their conversation?
- ? What do you think the two disciples were looking for that day?
- ? How can asking thoughtful questions deepen our conversations with others?
- ? What kind of questions might we use to help others on their spiritual journey?

Going deeper

- ? If Jesus asked you this question today, how would you respond?
- ? How much of a priority is it for you to ‘find God in all things’?

Prayer

Pray for people you know to become curious about Jesus through the conversations they have with you.

Ask that your conversations with Jesus over the coming weeks would help you know yourself and him more.

Practice this week

Make time to further consider what you want from Jesus just now and allow his question to be the start of a two-way conversation about it.

Try asking someone a gentle question to help them name what they are searching for and see where the conversation takes you.



Background notes



Context: This passage marks the start of Jesus' public ministry. The two disciples are Andrew and quite possibly John. They follow Jesus after hearing John the Baptist's persistent witness.



Cultural issues: It was common for would-be disciples to seek out rabbis and ask to learn from them. Jesus reverses this pattern, going out and choosing them personally.



Theological insight: God responds to those who are searching. A journey to faith begins with becoming curious.



Life lesson: Jesus' question is open ended and respectful. People are drawn into wanting to find out more about him by encounters which make them curious to know more rather than being given statements they are expected to accept at face value. The disciples respond with a question of their own and the conversation immediately becomes two-way.



Week 2: “Who do you say I am”

Jesus asks us to make our mind up

? Opening question

Have you ever felt put on the spot by a question you have been asked? How did you respond?

👋 Introduction

The location for today is Caesarea Philippi, a city to the north of the Sea of Galilee known for its pagan shrines and Greco-Roman culture. Away from the safety of familiar villages and amid so many competing claims to truth, Jesus asks his disciples “Who do people say I am?” That was easy. They’d heard all the talk - John the Baptist, one of the prophets, or even Elijah himself. But Jesus then makes it personal. What did they think? Peter, for one, finds himself moving from curiosity to clarity.

In our culture today there are many opinions about who Jesus was, but the question Jesus asks us is what do we think. This session invites us to consider what answer we would give and how we can help others be open about the options they would consider or the conclusions they have come to thus far.

📖 Read Mark 8:27-30

💬 Discussion

- ? Why do you think Jesus asked a question rather than simply telling them who he was?
- ? How significant do you think the setting for this question was?

- ? Why is it easier to talk about what others think about Jesus rather than who we know him to be ourselves?
- ? What do you think Peter's answer might have meant to him at the time?
- ? How can we help others voice their own answer easily and honestly whilst prompting them to wonder whether there could be more?

Going deeper

- ? How would you describe who Jesus is to you at his time in your life?
- ? What would your choices, your priorities and your relationships look like for you to live more fully in line with the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah?

Prayer

Pray for an opportunity to talk about Jesus this week and for the Holy Spirit to give you the words to express what you want to say. Ask that the whole of your life (your attitudes, lifestyle and aspirations) would be consistent with who you acknowledge Jesus to be.

Practice this week

Prayerfully consider how you would answer Jesus' question - what you would and wouldn't say. Write it down in a sentence or two or articulate it to a trusted friend.

Try gently asking someone about what they think Jesus was like and listen to their answer without immediately trying to amend what they say so it aligns with what you think.



Background notes



Context: Caesarea Philippi was in a Gentile region, 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.



Cultural issues: The city was built by Philip the Tetrarch and named after the emperor Caesar Augustus. It was filled with Roman temples for imperial worship and shrines to pagan gods, including a famous grotto dedicated to Pan, the Greek god of nature and fertility.



Theological insight: This passage marks a turning point in Mark's gospel. Peter's confession reveals the true identity of Jesus. The following verses (31-33) immediately reveal, however, that the implications for his mission were misunderstood.



Life lesson: Moments of clarity about Jesus often come when we're outside our comfort zones and challenged by different perspectives. Our role is not to persuade people to say all the right things but to make the space where easy answers no longer work and truth is recognised.



Week 3: “Why are you so afraid?”

Jesus is able to calm our fears

? Opening question

Think of a time when you were really frightened. How did you respond?

👋 Introduction

Today we are back in Galilee. We are met with a scene that isn't hard to imagine, as most of us will have found ourselves on a boat in the middle of a storm at some time or other. This squall was so fierce, however, that even the seasoned fishermen among the disciples were terrified. Somewhat incongruously, perhaps, Jesus is apparently oblivious to all the panic, sleeping soundly. His question, “Why are you so afraid?” is his response to their desperate shaking him to wake up, incredulous that he doesn't seem to care a hoot.

There are times in our lives when we all face storms of one sort or another. Just as the disciples had seen Jesus teach, heal and perform other miracles yet were still overwhelmed by fear, so we, despite all we have experienced of Jesus' loving presence, can also panic when life seems out of control. This session invites us to consider what our response to Jesus' question would be and what difference it could make to how we deal with times of crisis.

📖 Read Mark 4:35-41

💬 Discussion

? What emotions do you imagine the disciples were feeling during the storm?

- ? Why might Jesus have been fast asleep in such danger?
- ? What does his question reveal about his expectation of his disciples?
- ? Have you ever felt abandoned by God in a time of crisis? How did you respond to that feeling?
- ? How can we help someone who feels panic-stricken or fearful?

Going deeper

- ? What do your fears reveal about where you place your trust?
- ? Is it possible to have faith but still feel afraid? Is it a matter of learning to hold the two in tension or expecting faith to overcome our fear?

Prayer

Pray for those who are feeling stressed, and that you might be a voice of calm in conversations with anyone feeling anxious.

Ask that you would learn to trust God more deeply through the times of trouble you face and that you would know his peace in the turmoil.

Practice this week

In moments when you begin to feel fear or anxiety take the time to pause, breathe more slowly and visualise Jesus' calm presence beside you.

When with someone who is facing a crisis, instead of thinking you must find the right words to say, try offering yourself as a non-anxious presence so they sense Jesus' peace through you.



Background notes



Context: They were crossing the lake at the end of a long day of teaching. Squalls on the Sea of Galilee, due to its low elevation and surrounding hills, could be sudden and dangerous.



Cultural issues: In ancient Jewish thought, sleep symbolised trust, peace or perceived indifference. The Jews had a long tradition of lament, seen especially in the Psalms, in which crying out when in suffering and questioning God's care was seen as part of honest relationship, not an expression of irreverence.



Theological insight: In this first nature miracle in Mark's gospel Jesus doesn't pray to his Father but speaks directly to the wind and the waves, his authority mirroring God's power in creation. He doesn't only reveal his power but his divine identity, since in the Hebrew Scriptures, only God could command the wind and waves.



Life lesson: This passage reminds us that faith isn't the absence of fear - it's the decision to turn to Jesus in the midst of it. Storms are not evidence of God's absence but the place where we learn who he truly is. Jesus' calm is not indifference but confidence in his Father's care. When we accompany others through times of anxiety or uncertainty, the peace we have through Christ's indwelling our hearts can become the steady presence for their lives too.



Week 4: “Do you want to get well?”

Jesus offers healing and wholeness

? Opening question

When something goes wrong do you look for someone else to blame or set about trying to work out a way through it?

👏 Introduction

To suffer from a chronic illness is disabling and debilitating. No-one would choose to have one, so we might wonder whether asking someone suffering in that way whether they would like to be well is necessary, as well as being insensitive. Unless, that is, the question is not intended to be about physical healing alone. When Jesus engages in conversation with this man at the pool, his purpose is not only to offer him health but also wholeness of mind and heart. It is an invitation to move beyond seeing himself as a victim and blaming other people for his plight, and involves him being willing to do something about it himself rather than remaining reliant on others.

In today’s session we will recognise how Jesus treats a man with dignity, seeing the person rather than the disability. We will think about how we would answer his question ourselves and consider what we can learn about how we treat those around us who struggle with limitation and exclusion.

📖 Read John 5:1-9

💬 Discussion

? Why do you think Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed?

- ? What does the man's reply reveal?
- ? Why might someone prefer to resist the opportunity for healing?
- ? Have you ever felt defined by your wounds or limitations? How does Jesus' question confront that?
- ? How can we best support someone who isn't ready to change? What role could asking a question play in that?

Going deeper

- ? What comforts, routines or identities would you have to let go of in order for you to be made fully whole?
- ? In what ways might we subconsciously resist the wholeness Jesus offers, whether out of fear, habit or insecurity? Are you ready to accept help to move on?

Prayer

Pray for those you know with long-term health conditions; ask that God would use you to help them find hope.

Ask for openness to God telling you how to move on from attitudes in which you have become stuck.

Practice this week

Find a time to be quiet to think about Jesus' question for yourself. Listen for what he shows you and how he prompts you to respond. Take one concrete step to act on it during the week.

Choose one person to ask what they would like to be freed from and what step could they take to help things change.



Background notes



Context: The pool of Bethesda was situated near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. It was a popular place for people to congregate, especially those who were ill or disabled.



Cultural issues: Folk custom held that the pool had healing properties for the first person to enter it after an angel had stirred up the waters. It was therefore a place both of hope and despair. The man's condition would have left him marginalised and dependent. Jewish culture valued community and family support so his isolation was significant.



Theological insight: True healing from God consists of more than physical restoration - it is also emotional, mental, spiritual and relational. It represents a transition towards wholeness. Jesus doesn't impose healing but invites the man to take responsibility and play an active part in his healing.



Life lesson: The offer of wholeness can be disturbing, with its threat of disruption to familiar habits, dependencies and sense of identity. Asking a question can open up a space for self-examination and help those stuck in chronic circumstances to move on.



Week 5: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?”

Jesus says faith and action belong together

Opening question

Have you ever found yourself doing something you knew deep down wasn't right? What did you do about it?

Introduction

Today's passage concludes Jesus' famous Sermon on the Plain. He has become so popular that crowds gather to hear him speak, attracted by his miracles and wisdom. They show their admiration by calling him 'Lord' - a title implying authority, allegiance and a relationship in which the master had the right to demand the obedience of the servant. Yet Jesus' question indicates there was little evidence that his teaching was shaping the way they lived.

In our world today, where many find spirituality attractive but resist commitment, our reading is a reminder that following Jesus means far more than simply saying we believe. Our lifestyle, our actions, our priorities, our choices, all need to be in alignment with our profession of faith. In this session we will examine the foundation of our own lives and consider how we can help others understand what is at the heart of true faith and discipleship.

Read **Luke 6:46-49**

Discussion

? What do you think Jesus was getting at by asking this question?

- ? What was the difference between the two builders and why did that distinction matter so much to Jesus?
- ? Why do you think Jesus connects obedience with stability in storms?
- ? What does Jesus mean by solid foundations?
- ? How could you help someone who feels that everything is collapsing around them?

Going deeper

- ? What aspects of your life feel built on rock and which might be built on sand?
- ? What prevents you from fully following Jesus even though you believe in him?

Prayer

Pray for people whose lives are falling apart and for opportunities to help people rebuild on the rock of Jesus.

Ask for the courage to let go of parts of your life that have been based on things which may look fine but are not of Christ so that you can start again on what Jesus teaches.

Practice this week

Read all Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49). Choose one thing that jumps out as especially challenging and think of something you could do to start you living like that.

Get alongside someone facing a challenging time and share some words of Jesus to strengthen their foundation.



Background notes



Context: Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49) parallels the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. Jesus has just been teaching about the values people should live by - love, mercy, forgiveness, loving one's enemies and treating others justly.



Cultural insight: In first century Jewish culture, calling someone 'Lord' implies respect, authority or even divine status (as in calling Caesar 'Lord'). Saying it twice emphasises sincerity, demands attention or expresses urgency. The image of sea and storms represented forces of chaos beyond human control.



Theological perspectives: Jesus is emphasising that there is more to faith than belief and true discipleship involves obedience. Times of trial and suffering reveal the strength of someone's foundation. Jesus says he is the foundation - his words are to be the bedrock of his followers' lives.



Life lesson: Calling Jesus 'Lord' means surrendering to his will and ways; learning to do this builds our resilience to life's storms. Jesus' question invites us to examine where we have built on sand so we can rebuild those parts of our lives on him.



Week 6: “Do you love me?”

Jesus' love is unshaken by our failures

? Opening question

Can you think of a mistake you have made which has changed you for the better? Where was God in that?

👋 Introduction

We are now in the final chapter of John's gospel. Jesus has been crucified and has risen from the dead. His amazed and incredulous disciples and friends are still readjusting. After a long unrewarding night of fishing, Jesus meets his disciples on the shore, directs them towards a miraculous catch of fish and makes them breakfast. He then turns to Peter and asks him today's question not once, but three times. We can only imagine how Peter felt. After boldly claiming he would never desert Jesus, within hours he had denied him three times beside a courtyard fire at dead of night.

This session we are looking at the fact that Jesus comes to find us when we think we've blown it. He doesn't leave us to flounder in the fallout of our mistakes but sets us back on our feet, opening up a space where love can be reaffirmed and assuring us that he has a renewed purpose for us.

📖 Read John 21:15-19

💬 Discussion

? Why do you think Jesus asked this particular question three times?

- ? What do you think it means to love Jesus more than the things that might draw us away from him? How does this build on last week's discussion?
- ? Why did Jesus link love with the responsibility of caring for a flock?
- ? How do we discern what Jesus is asking us to 'feed' and 'take care of' in our own communities?
- ? How can we help people move from guilt or regret to renewed purpose?

Going deeper

- ? How would you answer Jesus' question and what might he be asking you to do next?
- ? Discipleship comes with a cost. What do you feel about the thought of suffering for your faith? Does your answer to this week's question remain the same?

Prayer

Pray for people living with sorrow and shame over past mistakes and for the opportunity to assure those you meet of Jesus' forgiveness.

Ask him to forgive you for any previously unacknowledged failures or mistakes and to help you move forwards according to his direction.

Practice this week

Take time to be quiet and imagine Jesus asking this question to you. Answer honestly, without feeling the need to make excuses. Take the time sit in his loving gaze and receive a sense of new purpose.

Ask what new arena of service you could move into or what act of love you could do for someone else this week.



Background notes



Context: This intimate conversation takes place after the miraculous catch of fish with all its reminders of Jesus' divinity, authority and lordship over creation, as well as the disciples' original calling. The meal provides the space for renewed fellowship and intimacy,



Cultural insight: In Jewish culture, repetition emphasises importance and emotional weight. Repeating a question three times would have felt deeply personal and quite possibly painful. Shepherd imagery was familiar and associated with God himself, kings and leaders, conferring a pastoral role on Peter. To be a shepherd was to be entrusted with lives, lead with compassion and reflect God's care.



Theological perspectives: This passage is about grace and calling - Peter is not only forgiven but recommissioned. Jesus meets Peter in his failure and gives him new purpose. His love for Jesus is to be not only something that he feels but something that is shown in the action of caring for others.



Life lesson: With Jesus, failure isn't the last word but the door through which you can begin again. To love Jesus is to be given the responsibility of caring for others, a calling that is both transformative and costly.



Going forwards

Further reflection following on from week 6:

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, first published in 1937, Dietrich Bonhoeffer contrasts what he calls “cheap grace” and “costly grace”. He describes cheap grace as the kind of religion which offers forgiveness without calling for repentance, baptism without obedience and comfort without the cross; grace that excuses rather than transforms. Costly grace is that which calls a person to follow Jesus completely- to surrender, to die to self and live in total dependence on Him. Echoing Luke 6:46 he insists that calling Jesus ‘Lord’, must be matched by doing what he says. We can also hear John 21:18 in his statement “*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die*”. He challenges believers to embrace this costly grace, the fruit of exclusive allegiance to Jesus, even when it leads through suffering. Bonhoeffer’s own life ended in martyrdom for resisting Hitler, living out his call to follow Christ no matter the cost.

Something to think about

Write down what you have learned from this series and what you want to take forward with you.

More questions to look at:

“Do you see this woman?” Luke 7:44 - a call to recognise dignity

“Will you give me a drink?” John 4:7 - a request for help

“Do you believe this?” John 11:26 - a challenge to faith

“Why are you sleeping?” Luke 22:46 - a call to stay alert