

Asking Questions like Christ

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The Savior, Jesus Christ, is indisputably the Master Teacher. Throughout the New Testament, He taught multitudes of people as part of His divine commission as the Savior of the world. Through His teachings, He clearly conveyed His gospel in a way that has brought millions to faith and repentance. Modern prophets have also pointed out that Christ's teachings serve as a starting point for gospel teachers today in learning the skills of effective teaching. Perhaps one of the tools He most commonly used in teaching was that of asking questions. Christ's questions were extremely effective in teaching His students the gospel. Thus, the best way for the modern disciple of Christ to improve his teaching is to examine and use the kinds of questions the Savior asked.

It is clear that there is no way to look at every possible circumstance in which the Master Teacher used questions; however, it is possible to make generalizations about when and why He used certain questions. Throughout His earthly ministry in Jerusalem, there are a few common stimuli that consistently prompted questions. The first and foremost is that of His own teaching. He often used questions as a way to begin and end his teaching, each with a slightly different purpose. Secondly, Christ often used multiple questions in the midst of His teaching. These series and strings of questions flowed naturally with His teaching to help teach complex principles. Next is the context of questions that He used in response to questions that were asked to Him. This provides a great opportunity to understand how to respond to both criticism and true interest alike. Finally, the Savior used questions before and after miracles. He asked these questions in order to teach both basic gospel principles and a useful manner to respond to the miracles that occur in everyday life. All in all, the most important question to consider in this

process is the personal significance and application that these questions have today. For in the end, we must be “doers of the word” and not “hearers only”¹

It is interesting to note that the Savior often began and ended His teaching with questions. By encouraging the participation of those involved, the Savior effectively drew in His audience. While the questions He asked at the beginning of His teaching focused mostly on preparing the audience for forthcoming teachings, the concluding questions focused on application and soul searching. Nonetheless, asking questions at both the beginning and the end made His lessons more impactful and longer lasting.

Often, the Master Teacher began His teaching with a question. This helped those that He taught to prepare themselves for the material that He was about to teach them. After teaching part of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord demonstrated this principle. He instructed the multitude by beginning, “Can the blind lead the blind?”² As they contemplated this question, they would have undoubtedly been led to conclude that it was necessary to have a leader among the blind. Because of this pondering, the multitude was even better prepared when the Savior taught them more about righteous leadership. Another instance of beginning with a question was when Christ’s disciples asked Him for further instruction about the sanctity of the body. He began teaching His disciples by saying, “Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it entereth not into his heart?”³ His disciples naturally would have agreed that this was sound logic. They were then prepared for the following teachings about the real source of defilement. Beginning with a question was thus a very effective method because the Savior was able to focus the attention of those listening on new information that He was about to present.

The Savior also used questions when concluding His teaching. One of the reasons that He did this was to send those listening away knowing that they understood what had been taught and searching their souls to know more. For example, after giving a great number of parables, the Savior asked the multitude, “Have ye understood all these things?”⁴ While already knowing that they had understood, the Master Teacher allowed His students to go away, with a conscious knowledge that they had learned. Such knowledge would promote further soul searching and learning. Other times, rather than directly verifying understanding, the Savior left the audience with a question that made them think. As part of the Sermon on the Mount, He taught His disciples about the nature of God by talking about giving good gifts. He concluded His teaching with the question, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”⁵ This question allowed those listening to ponder about the goodness of God and perhaps about what they might have to do to obtain the Holy Spirit. Thus, the teaching was perpetuated through the rest of the day, rather than ending at the moment that the instruction ended. Truthfully, up to the parting moment of teaching, the Savior’s questions fostered greater learning and application.

The same techniques can be implemented today. Without knowing everything, a wise teacher can begin class by engaging the students in a thought provoking question that will naturally introduce the rest of the lesson. Such questions can help to humble the students, and through their own initiative, the students will be better prepared to learn. With the students answering the question, they will anticipate what follows in the lesson and will be better prepared when it is presented. As the students are thus engaged, the final questions will justly continue the teaching that took place in the classroom. Rather than being left feeling entirely satisfied, the students will be left with a hunger to know more and to search out the answers to

these questions. Thus, the learning will be both framed and perpetuated by beginning and ending with a question.

Also, Christ commonly used questions in the context of His own words and parables. His teachings are fraught with questions in order to help His brothers and sisters learn the principles that He sought to teach them. In order to foster understanding, He often asked many questions at once, rather than asking one solitary question. The repetition of the same question and the strings of different questions are two of the methods that Christ used. Both ways are equally important in facilitating understanding and allowing the Holy Ghost to personalize the teachings to the individual.

The Savior occasionally repeated questions in order to make the hearers self evaluate and prepare themselves for additional teaching. This is seen when John's disciples came inquiring if Jesus was the Christ. The Lord continually asked them, "What went ye out to see?"⁶ as a means to highlight His teachings on the mission of John the Baptist. While the question didn't change much between the three times it was asked, John's disciples were most likely continually being prepared by contemplating why the Savior kept asking the same question. The Savior followed the same pattern in teaching His apostles and enemies as He was about to be betrayed. As the betrayers approached, He asked, "Whom seek ye?"⁷ While He knew perfectly well that they were searching for Him, the Savior allowed those pursuing Him to respond and to condemn themselves after searching their souls. It is interesting to note that after the first time Christ asked this, they "went backward, and fell to the ground"⁸ The Savior used this unique opportunity to teach even those who were about to lead Him to His death. He also used a similar technique with Peter when speaking to him after His resurrection. Christ repeatedly asked, "Lovest thou me?"⁹ While perhaps the point was made with the first iteration, there can be no doubt as to the depth of

understanding obtained after repeating the question three times. This must have led Peter to self analysis and increased humility, preparing him for the teachings that were about to be presented. All three examples give a clear demonstration of the humbling and teaching power in the repetition of a simple question.

Another fundamental element of the Savior's teaching was the use of a string of questions to teach a principle. By using this method, He was able to guide the student to understand exactly what He wanted to teach. In the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, the Savior used a string of questions to teach the multitude about loving everyone, not just those that were easy to love.¹⁰ In essence, He asked, "Do you love those that love you?" "Don't the sinners do the same?" He used four separate questions to make this point. By guiding their thoughts through these questions, the Savior ensured that they understood the material presented rather than merely hearing it. Christ also used the same method when inviting those listening to "consider the lilies of the field."¹¹ After inviting them to do so, He guided their thoughts to extend the analogy to their present circumstances by asking pointed questions such as "Are ye not much better than they?"¹² This time, the Savior helped the multitude understand even deeper than before by using questions to help them apply what they heard and understood. Perhaps the most famous example of a string of questions is in Peter's testimony of the Savior. In Caesarea Phillipi, Christ asked His apostles the startling question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"¹³ After their response, He continued, "But whom say ye that I am?"¹⁴ The most telling part of the efficacy of this method of teaching is found in Peter's testimony that followed: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹⁵ By carefully guiding them through questions, Christ not only promoted learning, but also helped Peter strengthen his personal testimony. As in other parts of His teachings, the Savior used question strings to make His teaching more powerful and easily applicable.

For the teacher today, these examples explain a great deal about the appropriateness of questions at all stages of teaching and also highlights their uses at each stage. While teaching, questions can be used effectively to draw in the students and help them understand the principles that are being taught. By repeating pointed questions, the students will also gain a more profound understanding of the basic principles of the gospel. Even more than understanding, learning by the Spirit will be achieved as a gospel teacher effectively uses questions to foster participation and internalization by the student. Just as Christ did with Peter, the teacher today can elicit the testimony of his or her students through questions. As the students bear their testimony, their testimony will be strengthened, and the students' commitment to the gospel will be deepened. If a teacher knows when and how to effectively use questions, both the teacher and the student can be edified and uplifted by the Spirit.

As with most teaching, the methods that the Savior used also depended on what had just transpired. He always adapted His teaching to the needs of those listening, and paid particular attention to the needs that were expressed. Thus, one of His most powerful methods of teaching was to answer the questions of believers and unbelievers alike with a question of His own. This allowed Him to regain control of the situation and point those He taught back to the scriptures as a source to answer their questions.

Often, the Savior used questions to take control of the teaching situation and to teach two different audiences at once. For example, as Christ was approaching the end of His ministry, the Pharisees and Herodians approached the Lord in an attempt to trick Him by asking, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"¹⁶ Christ immediately noted that the real reason they asked the question was to trick Him and responded with the rebuke, "Why tempt ye me?"¹⁷ However, He also realized the great teaching opportunity that this presented and did not end the teaching with

that rebuke. He continued by requesting that the Pharisees and Herodians bring a penny, and then He asked, “Whose is this image and superscription?”¹⁸ Christ followed this by stating, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”¹⁹ Thus, those who were with Him, for Christ rarely traveled alone, were taught about the importance of obeying and honoring the law, while those who opposed Him were sufficiently rebuked. Another similar situation was when the Pharisees approached Christ to question Him by what authority He worked miracles. Christ knew of the devious trap they were trying to lay, but He still recognized the opportunity to teach and responded, “The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?”²⁰ This was particularly effective because His disciples and those that accompanied Him quickly answered the question internally and understood that Christ’s authority came from heaven. Meanwhile, the Pharisees were stumped and unable to answer His question because they were afraid of the political ramifications of their answers. So, the Pharisees learned nothing while the disciples learned great lessons. By responding to questions with more questions, Christ showed that He was not only able to regain control of the situation, but that He was also able to teach the people and address their assorted needs.

Perhaps Christ’s most common use of questions to answer questions was to guide those that He taught right back to the scriptures so that they could teach themselves. In response to questions about divorce, the resurrection, prophecy, and the Sabbath day, the Savior pointed those who asked back to the scriptures by asking, “Have ye not read?”²¹ and He then proceeded to cite scriptures to those He was teaching. Here, the Savior established His authority by showing that He was the one who gave the scriptures, and thus they could obtain the truth from the scriptures as well. This helped those He taught to become more spiritually independent so that when Christ was gone from them, they could still find the answers to their questions in the

scriptures. Another good example of this is when the lawyer asked Christ what he must do to inherit eternal life. The Master referred right back to the scriptures by responding, “What is written in the law? how readest thou?”²² By pointing the lawyer back to the law that he so ardently studied, the Savior showed the expectation that His students had studied the scriptures and were willing to look for answers for themselves. It was not enough to have a desire to know, they had to act. Thus, in acts of great love, the Savior showed those with questions the way to find answers all on their own.

Teachers in the church today struggle with several problems that can be alleviated by asking questions. One such problem is knowing how to teach large groups of students. In any given class there is a great variety of students. This assortment of students assures that there will be some who, like Christ’s disciples, are ready to receive instruction, and others who, like the Pharisees, aren’t as interested in learning. Undoubtedly, questions will arise. By following Christ’s example, a wise teacher may choose to answer a student’s question with another question. This promotes soul searching among those that are truly interested while evoking little more than mental consideration in those that are only in the class to pass the time. Another common problem that faces teachers is encouraging their students to study the scriptures outside of class. One solution that the Savior gives here is to answer their questions with a question and then send them back to the scriptures to find the answer. By answering a question with a question, students will learn how to answer their own questions and teach themselves through the scriptures, which they can always have with them, rather than deepening the need to have the teacher personally present at all times.

Finally, many of the questions that the Savior asked surrounded miracles. The many miracles the Savior performed in His earthly ministry range from casting out demons to healing

the blind, from forgiving sins to raising the dead. With these miracles as a backdrop, the Savior taught those present by asking questions. These questions allowed those who wanted to be healed to express their desires to be healed, show their faith, and come to know the Savior. By asking questions both before and after working miracles, the Savior was able to heal the people both physically and spiritually.

One purpose of the pre-miracle questions that the Savior asked was to see the desires and faith of those who wanted to be healed; He allowed the afflicted to manifest their desire to be made whole. This is seen when Christ healed Bartimaeus, the blind man. As Christ and His apostles neared Jericho, Bartimaeus cried out, pleading for mercy. The Lord responded to his pleas to come to him and asked, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?”²³ The blind man asked to receive his sight, and he was healed. It is interesting to note how the Savior allowed the entire incident to flow naturally, when He already knew that Bartimaeus wanted to be healed. Nonetheless, by allowing him to lead the conversation, Christ permitted Bartimaeus to express his desire and faith, which undoubtedly strengthened them. So, Bartimaeus was not only cured of his blindness, but his spiritual vision was also improved. The Savior followed the same pattern before he raised Lazarus from the dead. Christ first taught Martha about the resurrection and His power over death, testifying “I am the resurrection, and the life,” and He then asked, “believest thou this?”²⁴ Here was the opportunity for Martha to show her desires and faith. She responded, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”²⁵ This powerful testimony allowed for the miracle and also cemented the relationship between Martha’s desire for her brother to be raised from the dead and her faith and testimony. Keeping in mind that Christ knew all of these people perfectly, and already knew if they had

faith, it is easier to understand that these questions were really opportunities for those involved to show faith and bear testimony.

Sometimes, Christ asked questions after miracles were performed. The added emphasis on the miracle that had just occurred helped make those healed whole, both spiritually and physically. For example, after the woman with an issue of blood touched Jesus and was healed, He asked, “Who touched me?”²⁶ It is unreasonable to think that the Creator of all didn’t know who touched Him; thus, the purpose of this question was probably to allow the woman to show her faith to be healed and witness it to the multitude. In addition, the multitude saw Christ’s divine power once more, which reaffirmed the Savior’s divinity. The Savior asked similar questions after healing the man blind from birth at the pool of Siloam. After the Savior healed the man, the Pharisees cast him out. Later, the Savior went seeking the man. Once He found him, He asked, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”²⁸ While confused at first as to whom the Son of God was, he answered that he did, and then he fell down and worshipped his Redeemer. If the Savior had not followed up the miracle with a question, the formerly blind man might not have become spiritually whole. The story of the ten lepers teaches the same principle. After healing ten lepers, one returned, and the Lord asked him, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” and then He continued, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.”²⁷ This man effectively had shown his faith and born his testimony by returning. Responding to such a sign, the Lord was able to teach his disciples that faith is necessary to make one whole. While ten were healed, perhaps only one was made whole. The grateful leper left having been made spiritually whole because he realized who performed the miracle and returned to Him. These examples greatly illuminate the fact that the questions that followed the Lord’s miracles helped to strengthen the testimony of those healed and make them whole in every way.

Teachers in the church today often witness miracles in their classrooms. Although the miracles are not of the same magnitude as those that the Savior performed, they are of equal value. For example, the presence of the Spirit during a lesson definitely qualifies as a miracle. The feeling of edification experienced by both the teacher and the student also qualifies as a miracle. By learning how to respond to these amazing events from the example of the Savior, a miracle can also become a great teaching experience. As the teacher recognizes what has occurred and takes the time to point it out to the class, all will be uplifted and taught. If the teacher uses questions as he or she does this, the experience will be remembered and better recalled and applied and testimony will be strengthened. Then, the power of the miracle will not be solely confined to the miracle itself, but it will continue in the lives of those present, making them whole. Christ clearly understood and taught that through the bearing of testimony and showing of faith, miracles may extend to the present day and continue effecting behavior for a lifetime.

In conclusion, the many questions that Christ asked effectively helped Him to reach both the mind and the heart of those that He taught. They also serve as a great model for the modern teacher to use to aid in effective teaching. By demonstrating this skill in many settings, the Savior showed its applicability to all teachers and classes. If we, as teachers today, focus on following the example of the Savior, our ability to reach the students will improve and the Spirit will be present in the teaching. We will find ourselves using questions in a variety of ways. We will use them to begin and end the lesson, in the context of our teachings and the teachings of the prophets, to respond to the questions from class members, and to discuss the daily miracles that surround us. Not only will this happen, but, more importantly, we will be following the example of the Master Teacher.

Notes

1. James 1:22
2. Luke 6:39
3. Mark 7:18-19
4. Matthew 13:51
5. Luke 11:13
6. Matthew 11:7, 9, 10
7. John 18:4, 7
8. John 18:6
9. John 21:15, 16, 17
10. Matthew 5:46-47
11. Matthew 6:25-30
12. Matthew 6:26
13. Matthew 16:13
14. Matthew 16:15
15. Matthew 16:16
16. Mark 12:14
17. Mark 12:15
18. Mark 12:16
19. Mark 12:17
20. Matthew 21:25
21. Matthew 19:4-5, 21:16, 22:31-32; Mark 2:25-26
22. Luke 10:26
23. Mark 10:46-51
24. John 11:25-26
25. John 11:27
26. Luke 8:45
27. Luke 17:17,19
28. John 9:35

Abstract

This paper analyzes the questions asked by the Savior, Jesus Christ, in light of how they can help the modern teacher to be more effective. It first looks at when the questions are asked in reference to the Master's teaching, at the beginning or at the end. Next, it examines two methods of using several questions to teach a principle. Then, it turns to analyze questions that are asked in response to questions. Finally, the paper looks at the questions asked surrounding miracles. Throughout the entire paper, ties are made to the present day, in hopes that the reader may easily apply these methods to their own teaching.