Where are you?

The questions of God: how the Father, the Son and the Spirit ask, and how to ask like him

The first thing God says to the human race after it falls is not an accusation, a sentence or a lecture. It is a question.

> *But the LORD God called out to the man, "Where are you?"* Genesis 3:9

The God who knows everything asks. He asks a man hiding in the trees, a slave running into the desert, a prophet who wants to die, a disciple who denied him three times, and a persecutor on the road to Damascus. Jesus' first recorded words are a question (Luke 2:49). So are his first words in John's Gospel, one of his last cries from the cross, and his first words to Mary at the empty tomb.

Why would an all-knowing God ask? John answers it in a single aside:

> *When Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?" But He was asking this to test him, for He knew what He was about to do.* John 6:5-6

God's questions are not for his information. They are for our transformation.

A question does what a statement can't. It makes room for an answer, and so for a person. It locates them, draws out what is in their heart, lets them see their own situation, and leaves them free to respond. Then God acts: he clothes, feeds, renames, restores and sends.

In this guide

1 Where are you?
2 The Father's questions
3 Elijah, Jonah, Job
4 The Son's questions
5 Four conversations
6 The Spirit
7 The counterfeit question
8 What the research says
9 How to ask like him
10 Practices

THE FIRST QUESTION IN THE BIBLE ISN'T GOD'S

> *Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* Genesis 3:1

Scripture opens its story of questions with a counterfeit: a question designed to plant doubt. Eight verses later God answers it with a question designed to bring a hiding man into the light. Learning to tell those two kinds of question apart is half of this guide (page 7).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- **Read with your Bible open.** Every quotation is from the Berean Standard Bible, and every reference is worth reading in context.
- **Let the questions ask you first.** Each one was put to a real person, and to you. The practices on page 10 are the heart of the guide.
- **Then learn to ask.** Pages 8–9 bring in the research on how questions change people, and turn the patterns into practical guidance for leading, mentoring, parenting and friendship.
- **Evidence markers:** ●●● strong research · ●●○ solid · ●○○ practice and history · ◐ contested or analogy only.

Before you turn the page

Read Genesis 3:8–10 slowly. Then answer God's first question in writing, honestly, in a sentence or two: *Where are you?* Not where you live, but where you are with him today. Keep the page; you'll come back to it on day 14.

The Father asks the hiding, the running and the angry. *And he asks before he acts.*

Read the Old Testament for God's questions and a pattern appears. He rarely asks the people who have it together. He asks people in the middle of failure, flight, fear or despair, and his questions do different jobs.

KIND	THE QUESTION
Location	*"Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9)
Direction	*"where have you come from, and where are you going?"* (Genesis 16:8) to Hagar, a runaway slave (spoken by the angel of the LORD, whom she names as God)
Exposure	*"Who told you that you were naked?"* (Genesis 3:11)
Heart, before the act	*"Why are you angry,"* (Genesis 4:6-7) to Cain, before the murder
Responsibility	*"Where is your brother Abel?"* (Genesis 4:9-10)
Resource	*"What is that in your hand?"* (Exodus 4:2) to Moses, who felt unqualified
Identity	*"What is your name?"* (Genesis 32:27) to Jacob, the deceiver, before renaming him
Perception	*"Jeremiah, what do you see?"* (Jeremiah 1:11) · *"Do you not see it?"* (Isaiah 43:19)
Possibility	*"Son of man, can these bones come to life?"* (Ezekiel 37:3) · *"Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"* (Genesis 18:14)
Grief that has run its course	*"How long are you going to mourn for Saul"* (1 Samuel 16:1)
Commission	*"Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?"* (Isaiah 6:8)
His own heart	*"How could I give you up, O Ephraim?"* (Hosea 11:8) · *"My people, what have I done to you?"* (Micah 6:3)

Five patterns

1. He asks what he already knows. God doesn't need Adam's location or Abel's whereabouts. The question is for the one being asked: it invites a confession that can't be forced.

2. He asks about the heart before the act. Cain is questioned while there is still time: *"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"* (Genesis 4:6-7) God's questions are often warnings given while the door is still open.

3. He starts from what the person has. To a man protesting he can't speak, God doesn't list what Moses lacks. He asks about the staff in his hand, and uses it.

4. A question is followed by provision. After the questions in the garden, *"the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them."* (Genesis 3:21) After her questions, Hagar names him: *"You are the God who sees me"* (Genesis 16:13). The question is the doorway; the grace comes through it.

5. His questions reveal his own heart. In Hosea and Micah, God questions himself and his people like a wounded parent. These aren't interrogations; they are the questions of love that refuses to let go.

> **GOD LETS PEOPLE QUESTION HIM, TOO**
>
> *"How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?"* (Psalm 13:1-2)
>
> Scripture includes whole books of human questions to God: the lament psalms, Job and Habakkuk. The psalm moves from *How long?* to *"But I have trusted in Your loving devotion"* (Psalm 13:5-6). A relationship in which only one side may ask questions is not the one God offers.

Try this

1. **Read Genesis 3:8–21** and count how many questions God asks before he says anything else.
2. **Before your next conflict,** ask yourself Cain's question: *Why am I angry?*
3. **List what is in your hand:** skills, relationships, time. God started there with Moses.

Three people at the end of themselves.
Three different ways God asked.

CASE · ELIJAH UNDER THE BROOM TREE (1 KINGS 19)

Fresh from victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah runs for his life and asks to die. God's first response is **not a question**. An angel touches him twice: *"Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you."* (1 Kings 19:4-8) Sleep, food, sleep, food, then a forty-day walk.

Only then: *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* (1 Kings 19:9) Elijah answers with his complaint, ending *"I am the only one left"* (1 Kings 19:10). God doesn't argue. He passes by: wind, earthquake, fire, and then *"a still, small voice"* (1 Kings 19:11-12). Then he asks **the same question again** (19:13), and Elijah gives **word for word the same answer** (19:14).

So God stops asking and acts. He gives Elijah new work, names his successor, and corrects the despair with a fact: *"I have reserved seven thousand in Israel"* (1 Kings 19:18). **Lessons:** meet the body before the soul; a question can be asked twice; when someone is stuck in a loop, the next move may be presence, purpose and truth rather than another question.

CASE · JONAH: THE BOOK THAT ENDS WITH A QUESTION

Jonah knew exactly what God was like, and that was his problem: *"I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God"* (Jonah 4:1-3). When Nineveh repents, he sulks. God asks: *"Have you any right to be angry?"* (Jonah 4:4) Jonah doesn't answer. God grows a plant to shade him, takes it away, and asks again. Jonah: *"I am angry enough to die!"* (Jonah 4:9-11)

The book ends on God's question: *"So should I not care about the great city of Nineveh"* (Jonah 4:9-11). **Jonah's answer is never recorded. The reader has to give it.** Some questions are meant to stay open until we answer them with our lives.

CASE · JOB: QUESTIONS ANSWERED WITH QUESTIONS

For thirty-five chapters Job asks God *why*, and his friends supply confident answers. When God finally speaks, out of the whirlwind, he gives no explanation at all. He asks questions instead, about seventy of them:

> *"Who is this who obscures My counsel by words without knowledge? Now brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall inform Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.* Job 38:2-4

Stars, sea, snow, lions, the mountain goat giving birth: God walks Job through a creation far beyond his grasp. It isn't a put-down; it's an enlargement. Job's first response is silence (40:4–5). His last is sight:

> *My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I retract my words, and I repent in dust and ashes."* Job 42:5-6

Then the twist: God says the friends, with all their answers, *"have not spoken about Me accurately, as My servant Job has."* (Job 42:7) The man who brought God his raw questions spoke rightly; the men who explained God neatly did not. **Sometimes the answer to "why?" is not an explanation but a Presence, and a bigger world.**

WHAT THE THREE HAVE IN COMMON

- **None was asked from a position of strength.** Burnout, resentment and grief are where God's questions arrive.
- **The question is never the whole response.** Food (Elijah), a plant (Jonah) and a tour of creation (Job) surround the words.
- **God tolerates non-answers.** He repeats, waits, and lets a question hang across a whole book.
- **The questions enlarge the person's view**, from *I am the only one left* to seven thousand, from a plant to a city, from my pain to the whole of creation.

Try this

1. **Before you ask someone in crisis anything,** ask yourself: have they eaten, slept, been heard?
2. **Read Jonah 4 and write Jonah's answer**, as yours.
3. **Read Job 38 aloud outdoors.** Let the questions make you small, then safe.

Jesus asked far more than he answered.

His questions were his way of teaching, healing and calling.

By one pastor's count, Jesus asks about 300 questions in the Gospels and answers directly only a handful of the nearly 200 he is asked [1]. The exact numbers depend on how you count; the pattern is unmistakable. They frame his whole life: his first recorded words are a question (*"Why were you looking for Me?"* (Luke 2:49)), his first words in John's Gospel are a question, one of his last cries is a question, and the risen Christ greets his friends with questions.

KIND	THE QUESTION
Desire	*"What do you want?"* (John 1:38) · *"Do you want to get well?"* (John 5:6)
Identity	*"Who do people say I am?"* (Mark 8:27) then *"But what about you?"* (Mark 8:29)
Interpretation	*"What is written in the Law?"* (Luke 10:26) *"How do you read it?"* (Luke 10:26)
You be the judge	A story, then *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor"* (Luke 10:36-37) · *"Which one, then, will love him more?"* (Luke 7:42) · *"But what do you think?"* (Matthew 21:28)
Remember	*"how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you collect?"* (Mark 8:17-21) *"Do you still not understand?"* (Mark 8:17-21)
Resource	*"Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?"* (John 6:5-6) · *"Go and see how many loaves you have"* (Mark 6:38)
Emotion	*"Why are you so afraid?"* (Mark 4:40) · *"Woman, why are you weeping?"* (John 20:15)
Motive	*"Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?"* (Mark 2:8) · *"Why do you call Me good?"* (Mark 10:18)
Exposure	*"What were you discussing on the way?"* (Mark 9:33-34) They had been arguing about who was greatest.
Compassion	*"How long has this been with him?"* (Mark 9:21) to a desperate father
Counter-question	*"John's baptism—was it from heaven or from men?"* (Mark 11:29-30) · *"Whose image is this"* (Matthew 22:17-20)
Perspective	*"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"* (Matthew 6:27)
Freedom	*"Do you want to leave too?"* (John 6:67-68)
Restoration	*"Simon son of John, do you love Me?"* (John 21:15-17)
Lament	*"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46)

Six things Jesus did with questions

1. He surfaced desire before he met need. He asked a man paralysed for 38 years whether he wanted to get well, and a blind man what he wanted. He never assumed. Desire named aloud becomes faith exercised.

2. He made people do the work. Instead of answering the lawyer, he asked *how do you read it?* Instead of defining "neighbour", he told a story and made the lawyer say who was one. People believe what they themselves say.

3. He moved from the general to the personal. *Who do people say...?* is safe. *But what about you?* is not. Most of his conversations narrow to that point.

4. He used memory. Asking the disciples to recount the baskets of leftovers made them retrieve the evidence themselves. Faith grows by remembering what God has done.

5. He answered traps with questions. When questions were weapons, his counter-questions exposed the motive without taking the bait (page 7).

6. He left people free. When many walked away, he asked the Twelve *Do you want to leave too?* He loved the rich man and let him go (Mark 10:21–22). Love asks; it does not compel.

> **THE QUESTION JESUS ASKED HIS FATHER**
>
> On the cross, the Son prays Psalm 22 as a question: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46) The One who asked so many questions entered fully into ours. Our hardest questions to God are not outside his experience; he has prayed them himself.

Try this

1. **Read one Gospel chapter** and mark every question Jesus asks. Note who he asks and what happens next.
2. **Return one question:** when someone asks your advice this week, first ask *What do you think?*
3. **Narrow one conversation** from *What do people think?* to *What do you think?*

Sources. [1] Copenhaver (2014), *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered*, Abingdon. His counting method isn't published, and others count differently. Scripture: BSB.

One question, two answers. One walk, three questions.
Watch how Jesus actually used them.

CASE · MARK 10: THE SAME QUESTION TWICE

In one chapter Jesus asks the identical question twice. James and John come asking for a favour, and he says: *"What do you want Me to do for you?"* (Mark 10:36) They answer: *"Grant that one of us may sit at Your right hand and the other at Your left in Your glory."* (Mark 10:37)

A few verses later, a blind beggar is shouting by the road at Jericho. Jesus stops and asks exactly the same thing (10:51). Bartimaeus answers: *"let me see again."* (Mark 10:51)

The disciples asked for status; the beggar asked for sight. **The same open question revealed two hearts.** Jesus didn't need to diagnose them; their own answers did it. A good question is a mirror.

CASE · THE RICH MAN: LOVED, AND LET GO

A man runs to Jesus, kneels, and asks how to inherit eternal life. Jesus first questions his words (*"Why do you call Me good?"* (Mark 10:18)), then names the one thing that held him. Mark adds a detail found nowhere else: *"Jesus looked at him, loved him"* (Mark 10:21-22). And the man *"went away in sorrow"* (Mark 10:21-22). Jesus didn't chase him, lower the bar, or argue. **The truest questions and invitations carry the risk of a no, and God accepts that risk.**

CASE · PETER BY THE CHARCOAL FIRE (JOHN 18, 21)

Peter denied Jesus three times, each time in answer to a question (*"Aren't you also one of this man's disciples?"* (John 18:17)), standing by *"a charcoal fire"* (John 18:18). After the resurrection Jesus cooks breakfast on *"a charcoal fire"* (John 21:9) and asks three times: *"Simon son of John, do you love Me?"* (John 21:15-17)

He uses Peter's old name, Simon, not "the Rock". He asks once for every denial, beside the same kind of fire. Each answer is met with a commission: *"Feed My sheep."* (John 21:15-17) The third question hurts (21:17), and it heals. **Restoration happens through questions that let a person replace their worst answer with a true one.**

CASE · THE ROAD TO EMMAUS: THE FULL SEQUENCE (LUKE 24)

Two disciples walk away from Jerusalem, devastated. Watch the order of what Jesus does:

1. Come near	*"Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them."* (Luke 24:15-16)
2. Ask	*"What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"* (Luke 24:17-19) They stop, *"with sadness on their faces."* (Luke 24:17-19)
3. Ask again	Cleopas is incredulous that he doesn't know. Jesus, who knows better than anyone, asks: *"What things?"* (Luke 24:17-19) He lets them tell the whole story.
4. Reframe	A question, then teaching: *"Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things"* (Luke 24:26-27), and he opens the Scriptures.
5. Reveal	At the table, *"He took bread, spoke a blessing and broke it"* (Luke 24:30-32), and they recognise him.
6. They ask	*"Were not our hearts burning within us"* (Luke 24:30-32). Now they are the ones asking, and they run back to Jerusalem.

The pattern for any hard conversation: walk with them; ask what's on their mind; let them tell all of it, even what you already know; only then offer a new frame; let the truth land in something shared; and notice when *they* start asking.

A WOMAN WHO LEARNED TO ASK

Jesus begins with the Samaritan woman by asking a favour, *"Give Me a drink."* (John 4:7) By the end, her witness to the whole town is not a claim but a question: *"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"* (John 4:28-29) And it works (4:39). **People who have been asked well learn to ask well.**

Try this

1. Ask someone *What do you want me to do for you?* and mean it.
2. In your next hard conversation, follow the Emmaus order. Do not skip step 3.
3. Write Jesus' question to Peter with your own name in it, and answer it.

The Spirit rarely asks; he moves us to ask.
And he keeps Jesus' questions alive in us.

Honesty first: Scripture almost never records the Holy Spirit asking a direct question. It would be easy to invent "the Spirit's questions", but it would be untrue. What the text shows is richer: the Spirit works *inside* people, and very often the result is that **they** begin to ask.

How the Spirit influences, in the text

Reminds	*"will remind you of everything I have told you."* (John 14:26) Including every question Jesus asked.
Convicts	*"He will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment"* (John 16:8)
Guides	*"He will guide you into all truth."* (John 16:13-14) And always toward Jesus: *"He will glorify Me"* (John 16:13-14)
Assures	*"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* (Romans 8:16)
Cries out in us	*"crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"* (Galatians 4:6)
Prays for us	*"we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words."* (Romans 8:26-27)
Searches	*"The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."* (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
Directs and restrains	*"Go over to that chariot and stay by it."* (Acts 8:29) · *"the Spirit of Jesus would not permit them."* (Acts 16:6-7)
Speaks in Scripture	The New Testament attributes the Old Testament's words to the Spirit: *"as the Holy Spirit says"* (Hebrews 3:7-8) · *"men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:21)

That last row matters. If the prophets spoke *as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*, then the questions of Scripture are, in the New Testament's own terms, the Spirit's speech. **When *Where are you?* finds you on an ordinary Tuesday, that is the Spirit asking.**

CASE · PENTECOST AND A PHILIPPIAN JAIL: WHEN PEOPLE START ASKING

After the Spirit falls and Peter preaches, nobody is argued into anything. Instead *"they were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"* (Acts 2:37-38) Years later, after an earthquake opens a jail, the jailer *"fell trembling before Paul and Silas"* (Acts 16:29-30) and asks: *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* (Acts 16:29-30)

The Spirit's fingerprint is often a new question in someone else's mouth. If you are working for people's good, watch for the moment they start asking. That is usually not your technique; it is his work.

THE TRINITY IN CONVERSATION

The God of Scripture is not a solitary voice issuing statements. The Lord asks in the plural, *"Who will go for Us?"* (Isaiah 6:8) The Son questions the Father on the cross. The Spirit cries *Abba* within us and prays for us when we have no words. Question, answer and intercession run inside the life of God, and we are invited into that conversation. Prayer isn't a form to fill in; it is a conversation that God began.

Hearing well: four tests

- **Does it sound like Jesus?** The Spirit glorifies him (John 16:14) and never contradicts him.
- **Test it.** *"test the spirits to see whether they are from God."* (1 John 4:1)
- **Test it together.** *"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"* (Acts 15:28). Discernment was a community act.
- **Look at the fruit.** Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness (Galatians 5:22–23). A voice that produces shame, panic or contempt isn't his (page 7).

Pray this

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns." (Psalm 139:23-24) Then sit in silence for five minutes and write down any question that rises. Test it by the four tests above before you act on it.

Not every question is an invitation.

Some are traps, and some are accusations dressed as curiosity.

The serpent's question in Genesis 3 is the template for every counterfeit: it sounds like an inquiry, but it is built to distort God's word (he never said "any tree"), plant suspicion of his goodness, and separate a person from the One who loves them. Learn its signature and you'll recognise it in other people, in institutions, and in your own head.

Two kinds of question

	GOD'S QUESTIONS	THE COUNTERFEIT
Purpose	Bring into the light, to restore	Plant doubt, to isolate
Stance	Knows, and loves anyway	Feigns ignorance, hides intent
Treats the word	Asks *"How do you read it?"* (Luke 10:26)	Twists it: *"Did God really say"* (Genesis 3:1)
Treats you	Leaves you free, gives you a part to play	Corners you; any answer loses
Afterwards	Provision, commission, a new name	Shame, hiding, blame
Points you	Toward God and others	Inward, then away

CASE · THE TAX TRAP (MATTHEW 22)

Opponents flatter Jesus, then ask: *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"* (Matthew 22:17-20) "Yes" loses the crowd; "no" is sedition. Jesus names the motive (*"why are you testing Me?"* (Matthew 22:17-20)), asks for a coin, and asks: *"Whose image is this"* (Matthew 22:17-20) … *"and whose inscription?"* (Matthew 22:17-20) His question escapes the trap and goes deeper: if the coin bears Caesar's image, whose image do *you* bear (Genesis 1:27)? **Answering a trap with a better question is not evasion; it changes the subject to the truth.**

The counterfeit in everyday life

- **The gotcha:** a question you already know the answer to, asked to catch rather than to restore. (God asks known questions too. The difference is what he does with the answer.)
- **The leading question:** *"Don't you think you should…?"* is advice disguised as curiosity. It erodes trust once people notice.
- **The shaming "why":** *"Why would you do that?"* usually lands as an accusation. Try *"What happened?"* or *"What were you hoping for?"*
- **The interrogation:** rapid-fire questions with no space, no listening and no follow-up.
- **The inner accuser:** *"What is wrong with you? Who do you think you are?"* These have the serpent's signature. Answer them with God's questions and God's verdict (Romans 8:16).

EVEN TO A BETRAYER, A QUESTION

As Judas arrives with soldiers, Jesus doesn't denounce him. He asks: *"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"* (Luke 22:48) He uses his name. He asks him to see what he is doing. It is the last door held open. **God's questions keep dignity intact even at the point of betrayal.**

Try this week

1. **Audit your questions** for one day. Mark each one as an invitation or a counterfeit.
2. **Replace one "why" with a "what":** *What happened? What were you hoping for?*
3. **Catch one inner accusation,** write it down, and answer it with Romans 8:16.

Psychology keeps rediscovering what God does.
And it can't do what he does.

Researchers have spent decades studying how questions change memory, belief, emotion and behaviour. Much of what they found echoes patterns in Scripture. The match isn't proof of the Bible; read the parallels as illustrations of how the God who made us speaks to the way he made us.

FINDING	EVIDENCE	BIBLICAL PATTERN
We believe what we say ourselves	●●○ People are often more persuaded by reasons they come up with than by reasons handed to them.[1]	Story, then *"Which of these was a neighbour?"* (Luke 10:36)
We remember what we generate	●●● What you work out yourself is remembered better (about 0.4 SD across 86 studies).[2]	*"But what about you? Who do you say I am?"* (Mark 8:29)
Recalling strengthens learning	●●● Being asked to recall beats re-reading for long-term memory (about 0.5 SD).[3]	*"How many basketfuls…?"* (Mark 8:19–21)
Being asked about intentions changes behaviour	◐ Asking whether someone intends to act slightly raises follow-through; the effect is small and shrinks in the strictest studies.[4]	*"Whom shall I send?"* (Isaiah 6:8)
Open questions draw out change	●●● Motivational interviewing, built on open questions, has small but reliable effects across 100+ studies; people who voice their own reasons for change do better.[5]	*"Do you want to get well?"* (John 5:6)
Pressure provokes resistance; autonomy helps	●●● Freedom-threatening language provokes anger and counter-arguing; respecting choice sustains motivation and can be trained.[6]	*"Do you want to leave too?"* (John 6:67)
Naming a feeling calms it	●●○ Naming what you feel takes some of the heat out of it, though people don't expect it to.[7]	*"Why are you weeping?"* (John 20:15) · *"Why are you angry?"* (Genesis 4:6)
Questioning yourself in the second person	◐ Addressing yourself by name or as "you" helps you step back from distress in lab studies; field evidence is mixed. An analogy only.[8]	*"Why are you downcast, O my soul?"* (Psalm 42:5)
Awe shrinks the self	●●○ Awe, the response to vastness, is linked to generosity; why is still debated.[9]	*"Where were you when I laid the foundations…?"* (Job 38)
Guided questioning helps people revise their thinking	●●○ In therapy for depression, sessions with more guiding questions were followed by more improvement (55 patients).[10]	*"How do you read it?"* (Luke 10:26)
Follow-up questions build connection	●●○ People who ask more follow-up questions are liked more by the person they're talking to.[11]	*"What things?"* (Luke 24:19)

Where Scripture goes further

1. Technique versus love. Every finding above works for a salesperson as well as a saint, and can be used to manipulate. God's questions are never technique: the One asking has already decided to love you, and he follows the question with grace. Without that, the same moves become the serpent's.

2. Knowledge. Researchers ask because they don't know. God asks although he knows everything (John 6:6). So his questions are entirely for us; the most loving human questions share that quality.

3. Power to change. A good question opens a door; the research stops there. The One who asks in Scripture also gives: garments, bread, a new name, the Spirit.

4. Unanswered questions. The research seeks to resolve. Scripture leaves some questions open on purpose: Jonah's ending, Job's *why*. Some answers come as trust and presence, not information.

5. Sometimes the question must stop. At the Red Sea: *"Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward."* (Exodus 14:15) God's questions serve his purposes; when deliberation has become delay, he gives a command.

Sources. [1] Aronson (1999), *American Psychologist* 54(11), 875–884. [2] Slamecka & Graf (1978), *J. Exp. Psych.: Human Learning & Memory* 4(6); Bertsch et al. (2007), *Memory & Cognition* 35(2), 201–210. [3] Roediger & Karpicke (2006), *Psychological Science* 17(3); Adesope, Trevisan & Sundararajan (2017), *Review of Educational Research* 87(3). [4] Wood, Conner, Miles et al. (2016), *Personality & Social Psychology Review* 20(3), 245–268. [5] Miller & Rollnick (2013), *Motivational Interviewing*, 3rd ed.; Lundahl et al. (2010), *Research on Social Work Practice* 20(2), 137–160. [6] Brehm (1966); Rains (2013), *Human Communication Research* 39(1), 47–73; Ryan & Deci (2000), *American Psychologist* 55(1), 68–78; Su & Reeve (2011), *Educational Psychology Review* 23(1), 159–188. [7] Lieberman et al. (2007), *Psychological Science* 18(5), 421–428; Torre & Lieberman (2018), *Emotion Review* 10(2). [8] Kross et al. (2014), *JPSP* 106(2), 304–324; Moser et al. (2017), *Scientific Reports*. [9] Keltner & Haidt (2003), *Cognition & Emotion* 17(2); Piff et al. (2015), *JPSP* 108(6), 883–899. [10] Braun, Strunk, Sasso & Cooper (2015), *Behaviour Research & Therapy* 70, 32–37. [11] Huang, Yeomans, Brooks, Minson & Gino (2017), *JPSP* 113(3), 430–452. The markers rate the research, not the biblical parallel; ◖ = contested or analogy only.

Ten principles for asking like God asks.

For leaders, mentors, parents, friends and spouses.

PRINCIPLE	IN PRACTICE
1. Come near before you ask	Emmaus, Elijah. Walk, eat, sit with them first. A question from a distance feels like an audit.
2. Ask for their sake, not yours	Ask what you already know if it helps them see. Never ask to collect ammunition.
3. Start with desire	*What do you want? What are you hoping for? What do you want me to do for you?*
4. Locate before you advise	*Where are you with this? Where have you come from, and where are you going?*
5. Name the feeling	*What's making you sad? What are you angry about? What are you afraid of?*
6. Let them be the judge	Tell a story or show the evidence, then ask *What do you think?* Resist giving the answer.
7. Start from what's in their hand	*What do you already have? What has worked before? How many loaves?*
8. Ask again, patiently	Elijah was asked twice, Peter three times. The second question often reaches deeper than the first.
9. Leave them free	Accept a no. Don't chase, guilt or lower the truth. Love them while they walk.
10. Follow with provision and purpose	After the question: help, a next step, a commission. *Feed my sheep.* And know when to stop asking and say *go forward.*

Questions to retire

- **Stacked questions:** three at once. Ask one, then wait.
- **"Why" aimed at a person:** use "what happened?" instead.
- **Questions you won't wait for:** silence is part of the question. Count to seven.
- **Questions with a hidden answer:** if you have advice, offer it honestly, with permission: *"Can I tell you what I see?"*

A question bank

Mentoring	*Where are you right now, honestly? What do you want from this season? What's in your hand that you're not using? What would faithfulness look like this week?*
Leading a team	*What are we not saying? What would have to be true for this to work? Who should we have asked? What do you see that I don't?*
Someone in crisis	First: *Have you eaten? Have you slept?* Then: *What happened? What's the hardest part? What do you need right now?*
Parenting	*What was the best and hardest part of today? What were you hoping would happen? What do you think you should do?*
Marriage	*How are you, really? What's one thing I could do this week that would help you? Where did you feel far from me lately?*
Someone exploring faith	*What are you looking for? Who do you think Jesus is? What would it mean for you if it were true?*
Restoration	*What do you wish you'd done differently? What do you want now? What would a new start look like?*
Yourself	*Why am I downcast? What am I afraid of? Where am I hiding? What is God asking me today?*

CASE · THE OVERDUE REPORT (COMPOSITE)

Daniel, a team lead, discovered that a junior engineer, Ana, had missed a deadline and hidden it for two weeks. His first instinct was: *"Why didn't you tell me?"* Instead he booked a coffee, asked *"Where are you with the project, honestly?"*, and waited. She told him everything, including a sick parent. He asked *"What do you need?"*, then *"What can you still deliver by Friday?"*, and they agreed a plan. Three months later she was the first to raise a risk in a review. **He asked like Genesis 3:9, not like Genesis 3:1, and she stopped hiding.**

Try this week

1. Pick **one principle** and one relationship. Practise it three times.
2. Choose **one question from the bank** for someone you lead or love.
3. **Debrief:** what happened, what you noticed, and what you'll do differently.

Let God ask you first.
Fourteen days with his questions.

You can't ask like him until you've been asked by him. For fourteen days, take one question a day. Read it in context, sit quietly for five minutes, write your honest answer, and then ask him a question back. On day 14, reread what you wrote on page 1.

1 *"Where are you?"* Genesis 3:8–10

2 *"where have you come from, and where are you going?"* Genesis 16:7–13

3 *"What is that in your hand?"* Exodus 3:11–4:5

4 *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* (put your name in) 1 Kings 19:1–18

5 *"what do you see?"* Jeremiah 1:4–12

6 *"Whom shall I send?"* Isaiah 6:1–8

7 Rest. Read Psalm 13 and bring God your own *how long?*

8 *"What do you want?"* John 1:35–39

9 *"Do you want to get well?"* John 5:1–9

10 *"What do you want Me to do for you?"* Mark 10:46–52

11 *"Who do you say I am?"* Mark 8:27–30

12 *"why are you weeping?" … "Whom are you seeking?"* John 20:11–18

13 *"do you love Me?"* John 21:1–19

14 *"Where are you?"* again. Compare your answer with day 1.

Each day, ask one outward question too: put a question from page 9 to someone else, and listen to the answer.

THE EXAMEN: A DAILY REVIEW IN QUESTIONS

Ignatius's five points, in plain words ●○○:

1. **Give thanks** for the gifts of the day.
2. **Ask for light** to see the day truly.
3. **Review the day** hour by hour: thoughts, words, deeds. (A modern adaptation adds: *Where did I sense God? Where did I resist him?*)
4. **Ask forgiveness** for what you find.
5. **Resolve,** with his grace, for tomorrow.

FOR A GROUP OF THREE: QUESTIONS TO SHARE EACH WEEK

On Christmas Day 1738, John Wesley wrote rules for small "band" groups built on James 5:16. **Members answered the same four questions every week**[1] ●○○:

1. *What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?*
2. *What temptations have you met with?*
3. *How were you delivered?*
4. *What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?*

A gentler start for a new group (our adaptation): *Where did you see God this week? Where did you struggle? How did he meet you? What do you need from us?*

Ground rules: what's said stays in the room; no one is forced to answer; the leader answers first and honestly; end by praying for each other (James 5:16).

LAMENT: BRINGING GOD YOUR QUESTIONS

Psalm 13 gives the shape for honest prayer: **complaint** (*How long?*), **request** (*"Consider me and respond"* (Psalm 13:3)) and **trust** (*But I have trusted…*). Write your own in three short paragraphs. You don't have to reach the third quickly; the psalmist didn't.

Jesus prayed a lament on the cross. You are allowed to.

The question that remains

Every question in this guide eventually narrows to the one Jesus asked at Caesarea Philippi, after the safe version about what other people think:

"But what about you?" (Mark 8:29) *"Who do you say I am?"* (Mark 8:29)

Your answer to that one shapes how you answer all the others, and how you ask them of anyone else.

Sources. [1] Wesley (1738), "Rules of the Band-Societies, drawn up December 25, 1738", *Works* (Jackson ed., 1872) vol. 8; Bicentennial ed. vol. 9 (1989); transcriptions vary slightly. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* §43, "Method for making the General Examen" (Latin text approved 31 July 1548; trans. Mullan, 1914). Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (public domain).