

Coaching with the Questions of Jesus

An Invitation into Clarity, Discernment, and Wholehearted Response

Introduction

The decision had been building for some time, but no one knew what to do next.

Intel was under increasing pressure. Its core business—memory chips—was losing ground to international competitors. The company's leaders had studied the situation, discussed their options, and considered different ways forward. Still, no clear direction had emerged.

In a quieter moment, Andy Grove turned to Intel co-founder Gordon Moore and asked:

"If we were replaced and a new CEO came in, what do you think he would do?"

Moore did not hesitate.

"He would get us out of the memory chip business."

Grove paused and then asked another question:

"Why don't we walk out the door, come back, and do it ourselves?"

That exchange marked a turning point. Intel made the difficult decision to leave the memory business and focus on microprocessors—a move that would redefine the company.

The question did not make the decision easy. It helped them acknowledge what they already knew but had been reluctant to act upon.

Good questions have a way of doing that. They cut through noise, uncover what has been hiding in plain sight, and help people take responsibility for what comes next.

That is one of the great gifts of coaching.

A coach helps others discover and maximize their God-given gifts and talents.

A spiritual coach helps others discover God's activity and align with His purposes.

Spiritual coaching gives particular attention to what God may be doing, but the practice of asking good questions has a much wider application. Questions can help people grow in coaching, mentoring, leadership, discipleship, friendship, parenting, and ordinary conversations around a kitchen table.

Different relationships carry different responsibilities. A mentor may share wisdom and experience. A leader may need to provide direction. A parent may need to establish a boundary. A friend may need to speak honestly. Questions do not remove those responsibilities. They help us understand the person and the situation before we decide what we have to offer.

They also keep us from assuming that our experience should become someone else's path. We can certainly share what we have learned, but we also want to help people discover how God has uniquely wired and designed them. What gifts has He placed within them? What purposes may He be shaping? What are they being invited to learn, become, or do?

The companion paper *Investing Your Life in Others* explores the larger range of relationships through which we help people grow. This paper stays with one practice that can strengthen nearly all of

them: asking questions that help another person see clearly, discern wisely, and act with greater ownership.

Jesus often related to people this way.

He did not ask questions because He lacked information. He taught with authority, spoke through stories and parables, comforted, corrected, and sometimes confronted. He is the Truth, and His questions were never a substitute for truth. They were one of the ways He brought people into an honest encounter with it.

His example has much to teach us.

The Questions of Jesus

When we read the Gospels, we find Jesus asking questions in many different settings. Some were gentle. Others were direct and uncomfortable. Almost all of them reached beneath the surface.

Questions That Clarify Identity and Belief

“Who do you say I am?”
—Matthew 16:15 NIV

“Do you believe that I am able to do this?”
—Matthew 9:28 NIV

Jesus moved the conversation beyond what other people believed. He asked for a personal response. His questions brought belief out of the abstract and made it immediate: Who do you believe I am? Do you trust Me here?

Questions like these help people put words to what they actually believe—not merely what they think they are supposed to believe.

Questions That Expose Faith and Fear

“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”
—Matthew 8:26 NIV

“Where is your faith?”
—Luke 8:25 NIV

Fear often reveals where our confidence is resting. Jesus’ questions helped His disciples recognize the distance between what they professed and how they were responding in the moment.

A good question can surface that same tension. It can help someone recognize what is driving a decision, where fear may have displaced trust, or why a familiar response continues to appear.

Questions That Uncover Desire

“What do you want me to do for you?”
—Mark 10:51 NIV

“Do you want to get well?”
—John 5:6 NIV

At first, the answers may seem obvious. Yet Jesus invited people to name what they wanted.

Our desires are not always as clear as they appear. What we say we want and what we are willing to pursue, receive, or change may be very different. A thoughtful question can help someone identify a deeper longing, an unspoken fear, or a resistance they have not yet acknowledged.

Questions That Reveal Motives

“Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?”
—Matthew 9:4 NIV

“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?”
—Matthew 7:3 NIV

Jesus did not deal only with behavior. He addressed what was happening beneath it.

Our actions are often shaped by motives we have not fully examined—pride, fear, ambition, judgment, insecurity, or self-protection. Questions can help bring those motives into the light without immediately accusing or condemning the person.

Once something has been honestly named, it can be addressed.

Questions That Call for Commitment

“You do not want to leave too, do you?”
—John 6:67 NIV

“Do you love me?”
—John 21:15 NIV

Some questions lead to a point of decision. They move the conversation from reflection to response.

Jesus did not force people to follow Him. He made the invitation clear and allowed them to choose. His questions called for personal ownership. They helped people recognize that commitment cannot remain theoretical. Eventually, it must be lived.

Questions That Awaken Awareness of God’s Activity

“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”
—Luke 24:38 NIV

“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”
—Luke 24:17 NIV

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus was already present, but the disciples did not recognize Him. He entered their conversation with a question.

Sometimes God is at work before we understand what He is doing. A question can help someone slow down, revisit what has happened, and begin noticing what was previously missed.

Across these encounters, Jesus was not merely collecting answers. He was helping people name reality, recognize what was happening within them, discern what mattered, and decide how they would respond.

Those same movements can guide conversations today.

Questions That Help People Grow

Questions are not reserved for professional coaches. They belong anywhere one person is genuinely interested in the growth of another.

In coaching, questions help people discover their gifts, identify possibilities, and take ownership of their next steps.

In mentoring, questions help us understand the person before offering lessons from our own experience. They keep mentoring from becoming an attempt to reproduce ourselves in someone else.

In leadership, questions help us listen before deciding. They may reveal insight, ability, or concern that would otherwise remain hidden.

In discipleship and spiritual coaching, questions help people notice God's activity and consider how they might respond.

In friendship and parenting, questions communicate respect. They remind people that they are not projects to be managed but individuals to be known.

There will always be occasions when we need to teach, give counsel, set direction, or offer correction. But even then, a few thoughtful questions can help us understand what is really happening.

Questions do not diminish what we know. They help us know when and how to offer it.

What I Learned from Paul Stanley

I met Paul Stanley, and we walked together for almost twenty years until his death in 2020. We met regularly, taught side by side, traveled with our families, shared meals, and worked through some of life's most demanding seasons.

Paul gave me plenty of counsel. He shared what he had learned from his own life and helped me avoid mistakes he had already made. But when I look back, what stays with me most is not simply what he told me. It is the interest he took in my life and the questions he asked.

Paul would not ask one question and hurry on to the next subject. He stayed with the conversation. He listened to the answer and often followed it with another question. His curiosity helped me think, recognize patterns, and see possibilities I had not previously considered.

He was not trying to make me into another version of himself. He helped me discover how God had wired me, what I was learning, what I needed to face, and what might be possible. At times, he gave me challenges or opened doors for new experiences. At other times, he simply helped me think.

I felt known, valued, and believed in.

Only later did I understand how intentionally Paul had been mentoring, coaching, and developing me. The relationship eventually became deeper and more enduring than any one of those terms can describe. His questions were not merely conversational. They were formative.

Questions, in that sense, became a form of care.

Helping People Learn from Experience

Questions also help people learn from what they have lived.

Experience alone does not necessarily make us wiser. We can pass through an important season and never recognize what it was meant to teach us. Evaluated experience is different. It takes time to revisit

what happened, consider how we responded, and harvest the lessons that might otherwise be lost.

Someone who walks with us can help by asking:

What happened?

What did you learn about yourself?

What did the experience reveal about God?

What would you do differently now?

What wisdom from this season might help someone else?

Questions like these help people recognize patterns, recover meaning, and carry hard-earned wisdom into the future.

For a deeper treatment of how to revisit meaningful experiences and harvest the nuggets of wisdom within them, see the companion paper *Recognizing God's Fingerprints in Your Story*.

A Simple Way to Hold the Conversation

Good conversations do not have to follow a rigid formula. People are not formulas, and growth is rarely as orderly as we might prefer.

Still, it can be helpful to hold a simple pathway in mind:

Clarity Awareness Possibilities Discernment Action
Accountability

Not every conversation will move through all six areas. The order may change, and sometimes one question is enough. The pathway simply helps us recognize what may be needed next.

1. Clarity—What Is Really Going On?

Begin by understanding what the person wants or needs from the conversation.

The issue first presented is not always the real issue. A person may begin by talking about a difficult coworker and eventually recognize that the deeper concern is fear, disappointment, or uncertainty about the future.

Clarity helps define the focus. What is happening? What matters most? What would make the conversation useful?

Until the issue becomes clear, it is easy to spend time solving the wrong problem.

2. Awareness—What Is Happening Within You?

Once the situation is clearer, help the person notice what is happening internally.

What are they thinking and feeling? What assumptions are they making? What patterns, desires, gifts, fears, or tensions are present? In a spiritual conversation, where might God already be at work?

Awareness is more than analyzing emotions. It is learning to recognize the internal realities that are shaping our responses.

We cannot take responsibility for something we have not yet recognized.

3. Possibilities—What Options Do You See?

People often become stuck because they believe they have only one or two choices.

Before rushing toward a solution, create room to consider other possibilities. What else could they do? Who might help? What strengths or resources could they draw upon? What have they not yet considered?

The purpose is not to generate endless options. It is to loosen the hold of the first answer long enough for a better one to emerge.

4. Discernment—What Matters Most?

Possibilities must eventually be weighed.

Which option is wise? What aligns with the person's values, responsibilities, calling, and season of life? What are the likely consequences? What do trusted people see? In a spiritual conversation, what seems consistent with Scripture and with what God may be doing?

Discernment keeps coaching from becoming little more than personal preference. Not every possible path is a wise or faithful one.

5. Action—What Will You Do?

Insight becomes useful when it leads to a response.

The next step does not have to be dramatic. It should be specific and within the person's responsibility. They may need to begin a conversation, make a decision, gather information, practice a new behavior, or stop avoiding something that needs to be faced.

The person should be able to state clearly what they intend to do.

6. Accountability—How Will You Follow Through?

Good intentions can disappear when life becomes busy.

Accountability helps turn intention into commitment. When will the person act? How will they remember? What obstacles should they anticipate? Who needs to know? When will the two of you revisit the decision?

Accountability is not control. It is agreed-upon support that helps someone follow through on what they have chosen.

A Note on Discernment

Good coaching is not endless questioning.

Jesus did not only ask questions. He also taught, corrected, challenged, comforted, and gave clear direction. He responded to the person and the situation rather than relying on a single method.

We need the same discernment.

A leader should not use questions to avoid making a decision that belongs to the leader. A mentor should not withhold wisdom that could genuinely help. A parent should not turn a necessary boundary into a discussion with no conclusion. There are also times when encouragement, correction, or difficult truth needs to be offered plainly and graciously.

Before sharing an observation or experience, I often ask:

“Would it be helpful if I shared something I have noticed?”

That small question respects the other person and prepares them to listen. After sharing, we can return the conversation to them:

“What do you make of that?”

For more help with encouragement, correction, feedback, and difficult conversations, see the companion paper *Helping People Grow: Learning to Give and Receive Truth with Grace*.

A coach is not a counselor. Coaching may help someone think through a challenge, but it is not a substitute for professional counseling or other specialized care. When a need extends beyond our role or competence, wisdom includes helping the person find appropriate support.

The goal is not to master a questioning technique. It is to become more attentive—to the person, to the situation, and to what God may be doing.

Practicing the Way of Questions

Learning to ask good questions takes practice. A few simple habits can make a significant difference.

Ask one question at a time. Several questions strung together can overwhelm the person and usually reveal that we are doing more thinking than listening.

Keep questions short and open. Questions beginning with what or how often create more room than questions that can be answered with yes or no.

Listen to the words the person chooses. Pay attention to changes in energy, hesitation, emotion, or repeated phrases. Those moments may point toward something worth exploring.

Do not be afraid of silence. People sometimes need time to hear their own thoughts. Filling every quiet moment can interrupt the very reflection we are trying to encourage.

Simple follow-up questions are often the best:

“Tell me more.”

“What makes that important?”

“What do you think is beneath that?”

Reflecting what you hear can also help:

“I hear both excitement and hesitation. What do you think is creating the tension?”

Do not turn every statement into another question. A conversation should not feel like an interrogation. Sometimes the most helpful response is empathy, encouragement, truth, or simply remaining present.

When you have advice or experience to share, ask permission and offer it briefly. Then return ownership to the other person.

Common Pitfalls

Even with good intentions, several habits can limit the value of a coaching conversation:

- Asking too many questions without allowing time to think
- Using leading questions to steer someone toward our preferred answer
- Moving into advice before the real issue is understood
- Staying at the surface because deeper matters feel uncomfortable
- Making every issue sound spiritual while ignoring practical realities
- Ending with insight but no clear action or follow-through

The purpose of a question is not to demonstrate our skill. It is to serve the person in front of us.

Closing Reflection

The questions Jesus asked have not lost their power.

They still reach us in the quiet places of our own lives:

Who do you say that I am?

What do you want?

Why are you afraid?

Do you love Me?

These are not questions we answer only once. We continue answering them through the choices we make, the relationships we cultivate, and the lives we live.

Helping people grow is not primarily about having the right answers. It is about creating space where they can think honestly, see clearly, discern wisely, and respond with courage.

The right question, asked with genuine care, can help open a life.

Companion Papers

This paper is part of a set of four related papers. Each is designed to stand on its own while contributing to a larger understanding of how we help people grow.

Investing Your Life in Others: The Quiet Work of Walking with People as They Grow explores the broader ways we invest in others through modeling, teaching, mentoring, coaching, spiritual coaching, and enduring life-on-life relationships.

Helping People Grow: Learning to Give and Receive Truth with Grace focuses on encouragement, correction, feedback, and the difficult but necessary work of speaking truth in ways people can receive.

Recognizing God's Fingerprints in Your Story explores how to revisit meaningful experiences and harvest the nuggets of wisdom, purpose, and grace found within them.

Together, the papers address different parts of the same calling: walking with people attentively and helping them become more fully who God created them to be.

Appendix: A Short Guide to Questions That Help People Grow

These questions are not a checklist. Choose the one or two that seem most likely to help the person see more clearly and take the next responsible step.

They are starting places, not scripts. Select questions that fit the person, the relationship, and the situation. Not every conversation needs to move through all six areas, nor do the questions need to be asked in the order presented.

Clarity—What Is Really Going On?

- What would be most helpful for us to talk about today?
- What is really going on?
- How would you describe the situation in one or two sentences?
- What feels most important right now?
- What have you tried so far, and what happened?
- What would a useful outcome from this conversation look like?

Awareness—What Is Happening Within You?

- What are you noticing in yourself as you talk about this?
- What emotions are present?
- What assumptions might you be making?
- What do you really want?
- Where do you feel energy, tension, or resistance?
- What might God be showing you through this situation?

Possibilities—What Options Do You See?

- What options do you see?
- What else might be possible?
- If fear were not making the decision, what might you consider?
- What strengths, gifts, or experiences could you draw upon?
- Who or what might help you?
- What possibility have you dismissed too quickly?

Discernment—What Matters Most?

- Which possibility seems wisest, and why?
- What matters most in this decision?
- What aligns with your values, responsibilities, and purpose?
- What do you sense God may be inviting you to do?
- What counsel, truth, or Scripture should you consider?
- What might you need to release or say no to?

Action—What Will You Do?

- What will you do?
- What is the next practical step?
- What is within your responsibility and control?
- What preparation is needed?
- What might get in the way?
- What would meaningful progress look like?

Accountability—How Will You Follow Through?

- When will you take the next step?
- How will you keep this commitment in front of you?
- Who else needs to know?
- What support would be helpful?
- What will you do if you become stuck?
- When should we revisit your progress?

Source Note

The account of Andy Grove and Gordon Moore is drawn from Andrew S. Grove, *Only the Paranoid Survive: How to Exploit the Crisis Points That Challenge Every Company and Career* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1996), 89. Jerry's understanding of evaluated experience and the formative power of good questions was deeply influenced by his mentor, Paul Stanley. The six-stage pathway presented in this paper was developed by Jerry.

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