



How to Answer Confrontational Questions

As leaders, we occasionally experience the errors of practices, beliefs, and attitudes, in those we are called to lead or equip for ministry. How did Jesus handle these things? Direct or Indirect? Mind to mind, or spirit to spirit?

He was continually posed with questions from those who recognized He saw things differently than most leaders of their day. As leaders those we lead are frequently asking us why we believe what we believe, why we practice what we practice, and if we answer their questions correctly we encourage them towards the light. If we answer them incorrectly we discourage their hearts from believing true and healthy leadership exists.

Jesus is the pattern. His methods, manner, and attitudes were a great example to His disciples, May we learn from Him ourselves.

Jesus' approach was very different from how ours tends to be. The following passages will be considered from two perspectives.

1. How we would answer the issues posed to Him.
2. How Jesus answered the issues posed to Him.

Matthew 9:10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "**Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?**"

Mat 9:12 But when he heard it, he said, "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.**"

Mat 9:13 **Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."**

1. How would I tend to answer this issue?

First off, if I didn't keep a real tight grip on my attitudes, I'd be very tempted to say something like the following: "Look you guys, I know exactly what you are attempting to do here. You'd like nothing better for me than to get into a one-for-one argument with you, expose my own insecurities and fears of insignificance, and then have everyone stand back, and conclude I was no different from them, and walk away disillusioned with me. I'm not going there with you."

Can you believe He didn't do this? Can you believe He didn't painfully expose their hypocrisy, and directly confront what He knew they were trying to do?

He didn't rush to fix... I would want them to face their tendency to reject these people, but God loves them. I'd want them to see that they are manifesting arrogance in the way they think of them, supposing themselves to be sooo much better. I'd want them see that they need to humble their hearts and recognize God desires to save these people. Their concept of relationship with God is based on performance, therefore they drive everyone away from God by this approach, and give them the impression they don't stand a chance with God.

2. How did Jesus answer them?

No direct confrontation of their attitudes. No rush to fix. He went to the heart issue in their problem. What was it? Their concept of God was "duty/sacrifice" oriented. They believed they were acceptable with God based on their good works, and as they looked at the sinners, they supposed they had no chance with God based on their sinful works, so why was Jesus wasting His time with folks who obviously had no desire to work their way into heaven?

Jesus touches their hearts, by addressing the issue of mercy, grace, and the love of God, in comparison to a performance oriented relationship with God that leaves everyone fearful of performance failure.

When He addresses the issue of God's mercy, He not only challenges the Pharisees' legalism with the heart of God, but He also encourages the sinners that they do stand a chance with God despite their bad performance.

Jesus' approach is designed to make the Pharisees think, not engage them in an argument. He speaks a very short principle, without elaborating, pressing for agreement, or an attempt to convince them He is right. He just says what needs to be said, and leaves it for them to ponder.

This is very hard for us. We rush to fix those who oppose us, because we are insecure, and believe our worth is connected with proving our rightness and fixing their wrongness. Jesus never slipped into this trap. He knew His behavior was of God, needed no justification for what He did, and therefore simply spoke what their hearts needed to hear, rather than attempt to vindicate his behavior.

He knows He has all eternity to fix people. He's never in a hurry. Our tendency to hurry is more connected with our belief that our ministry will become more secure as we fix people, and our fear of insignificance pushes us to rush people into change so we appear to have made a great difference in the lives of those we ministered to, in a very short span of time.

Jesus has no insecurities. He feared no insignificance. He could take all the time necessary to bring them into the light.

We must know what we believe, practice what we know, and leave God to change people. The moment we press for change we reveal our goal is more to prove our rightness than to heal their twisted hearts.

Mat 9:14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "**Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?**"

Mat 9:15 And Jesus said to them, "**Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.**"

Mat 9:16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.

Mat 9:17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."

1. How would I tend to answer their question?

Because these men were asking a question they truly wanted a divine answer to, rather than just manifesting self righteousness, I'd probably launch into a full explanation of why I wasn't requiring my disciples to fast. I'd try to adjust their wrong notions of fasting that the Pharisees and Rabbi's had taught them over the years, and help them to understand the true value and nature of fasting.

I'd probably also spend some time adjusting their beliefs that God was looking for a "duty oriented life of self sacrifice" when what He was most looking for was a heart relationship with Him. I'd want them to understand that they tend to do what they do because they are afraid He won't accept them if they don't perform. It would be a similar approach as with the Pharisees, but without as much pressure to adjust their arrogance as to adjust their fears.

2. How did Jesus answer them?

Indirect answer. He opened their eyes as to Who He was - I.e. The Bridegroom of heaven. He addressed the joyful nature of the presence of God, rather than a fearful nature. He gave them illustrations from life to ponder, rather than directly explaining how their thinking was wrong.

Jesus isn't quick to fix. He's far more patient than we tend to be, and as a result He is more ready to give them something to think about, than rush to fix them, and create an impression that He needs us to quickly resolve our errors or inner tensions. He has all the time of eternity to fix us. We too quickly rush to correct wrong thinking so people can become more fruitful and overcome their errors. He's much more patient. He'd rather draw their spirits to God to discuss their confusion, than rush to change their minds.

We need to slow down, give people time to change, not give them all the answers, or address all their wrong thinking. The moment we push people to see everything the way we do, we communicate to them we are far better than they are, and rather than leaving them pondering the truths we bring, we shut them down and tend to lock them into an inner argument with our ideas of things.

This whole matter of security and significance is so huge, in the way we handle our leadership, and the manner in which we correct those who oppose or disagree. Jesus was the freest person on the planet because He never wrestled with these issues. He was always right and knew He was. He didn't need to react to their confrontations, to prove His rightness, because He wasn't wondering if just possibly He was wrong, but didn't want to have to admit it to avoid looking foolish. He knew He wasn't wrong. He was free to love, and communicate with true wisdom because of this freedom.

The more we know and understand who we are in God, and the manner in which God changes people, the more powerful our ministry will become.

Paul is an interesting case study, in this regards. Certainly we see him engaging the people's questions far more than Jesus ever did. His answers are long, and Jesus' tended to be very short, and far more designed to make them go away wondering what it was that He actually said, than trying to give a clear answer for them to argue with. However, where Paul is similar to Jesus is in his way of communicating the truth, but not manifesting any insecurity in it. He didn't need them to agree with him to feel significant about himself. He knew who He was in Christ, and was free to speak the truth in love, without all the other control features that far too often we use to get people to agree with us. He knew what they needed to hear, spoke it, and left it with God to make the changes. He too could have been far more confrontational or argumentative of style, but he simply laid out the clear revelation from God and left the people to absorb and apply it as they were able in Him.

Mat 11:1 When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

Mat 11:2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples

Mat 11:3 and said to him, **"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"**

Mat 11:4 And Jesus answered them, **"Go and tell John what you hear and see:**

Mat 11:5 **the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.**

Mat 11:6 **And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."**

1. How would I have tended to answer John?

I would have attempted to calm all his fears, to fix his unbelief, resolve his doubts by far more of a direct approach to the problem of fear and confusion he was experiencing. I would have wanted to speak so much encouragement, so many flatteries, and do everything I could to directly allay his fears.

I would have told John, "Look cousin, you are in a tough place, but caving in to fears and doubts right now is the last thing you need. Maintain a strong witness. God has placed you there to lead the jailors to Me. You just need to be willing to go through whatever comes, knowing that your cause and calling is a great one."

I would have tended to want him to admit he had already seen and heard enough, and to not let his fears get the best of him.

2. How does Jesus answer him?

Tell him what you've seen Me do. Let this reaffirm his beliefs. Bless him for refusing to go in his head where he has been tempted to go - offense with God. Jesus knew John was wrestling with how Jesus could be Messiah, and be the good God he had thought Him to be if He didn't come to the jail, flex His muscles, and bust him out of jail. Jesus is telling him indirectly that it is going to get far worse before it gets better, and what he is going to pass through is going to try to force him to be offended with God, but to stay the course of trust in God's perfect wisdom, and let his course be completed.

I can only imagine how much I would have wanted to say. Jesus didn't do it. He didn't need John to think well of Him. He didn't need to rush down there, free John, and gain John's applause, along with all of John's disciples and His own. He was secure enough in God to stay the course of God's plan for His own life and John's too, even though He knew John,

His flesh and blood cousin, was just about to be decapitated. What kind of grace is this? Absolutely amazing!

Mat 12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

Mat 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "**Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.**"

Mat 12:3 He said to them, "**Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him:**

Mat 12:4 **how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?**

Mat 12:5 **Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?**

Mat 12:6 **I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.**

Mat 12:7 **And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.**

Mat 12:8 **For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."**

1. How would I have been inclined to address their confrontation?

This one could really have gotten long winded. Being the Law Giver, I would have wanted to take them through a complete discourse on the real purpose for My having given them the Law, and show them how they had gotten it all wrong. I would have directly exposed their legalism, their arrogance, their wrong attitudes and thinking, but not Jesus. He does this, but He does it all indirectly.

2. How does Jesus answer them?

He reminds them of a story they knew, but had probably never seen from the angle He told it. It would have completely derailed their approach to their confrontation of Jesus. In not directly addressing their error, He takes the spotlight off of Himself, and puts it on the truth He wants them to wrestle with.

Notice He takes them right back to the heart issue they missed in Matthew 9. He knows they can't see God apart from legalism, fear, and anxiety, so He takes them right back to the love of God and His mercy, and connects them to these things. This is a clear case of telling them what their question revealed of the error of their hearts, instead of getting into a mental battle with them over the Law. They would have loved that battle. When Jesus doesn't engage them they are undoubtedly completely surprised, and His answer seems to them like no kind of answer to the question they were posing, but in fact it was addressing the real question in their heart they should have been asking Him - "Why are our hearts so sure God relates to us on the basis of performance? Why is it so hard to believe He loves us? Why are we sooo legalistic all the time?"

Jesus cuts right through it all, and reveals to them that they have NEVER understood the mercy of God. They are entirely hung up on the judgments of God. He does this without getting all tangled up in an argument, and leaves them stunned with both His grace and wisdom.

Can you see how valuable this approach is? Can you see how it would help you avoid getting into useless disputes over non issues? If we can let His love deal with our need to be agreed with, or our need to be "right," or a fixer, we can be used of God to minister to the deeper

and more real needs of the human condition and heart.

Mat 12:9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue.

Mat 12:10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, **"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"**—so that they might accuse him.

Mat 12:11 He said to them, **"Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?"**

Mat 12:12 **"Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."**

Mat 12:13 Then he said to the man, **"Stretch out your hand."** And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.

Mat 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

1. How would I have dealt with their accusation?

I might have confronted them directly about their hard heartedness. I might have told them they were just a bunch of old legalists. I might have healed the man's withered hand and withered one of the Pharisees hands, just to serve them for their legalism.

At the very least I would have engaged them in a full on correction of their misunderstanding of the original purpose for the Law, and directly helped them to see that my behavior wasn't wrong at all. It was their misperception of the Law that was their problem. Not Jesus...He does none of this.

2. How does Jesus speak into their error?

He goes right back to the love of God, and indirectly tells them that they have completely missed God's merciful love in His giving of the Law. They have done something "other" than what He intended with it. His act of love, and His teaching them of God's love through this act must have shattered the hardness of heart they had for mankind. Their image of God was a cruel and judgment oriented deity, who was more interested in everyone doing what was exactly "right" at the expense of revealing of the heart of God for people.

I can just imagine how amazed they would have been, when Jesus didn't argue with them, attempt to prove, through systematic argument, that they had it all wrong with the Law. He just tenderly reached over to the man with the withered hand, miraculously healed it right in front of their eyes, and then didn't even begin to gloat at how His miracle proved He was right. He just rejoiced to see the joy on that man's face. He let the impact of His act of love teach more than a million hours of direct teaching confrontation of their error.

Before you say you can't do this, because you can't heal like Jesus did, don't be quite so certain you can't, once you learn to walk in this kind of love, and even if you are unable to work such a miracle there is always a way to manifest the love of God in the face of error filled thinking, that will direct them back to Jesus and a corrected image of Who God really is.

I'm sure the people walked away that day thinking, "Oh my gosh...I had no idea God was so loving! How much else about God have I been confused on?"

Matthew 12:22-37

For the sake of saving some space here, I refer you to this passage, but briefly, this passage gives us the story of Jesus healing a demonized man, and the Pharisees interpreted it as an act of Satan casting himself out of this man, so as to create confusion in the observers.

They go the furthest they have ever gone, in describing Jesus in a wrong way, when they tell the audience their conclusion is Jesus did this by the power of Satan.

Now step back from this scene for a minute and ask yourself if you could have maintained the composure Jesus did, at being referred to as “Beelzebub - the Lord of all Demons.”

Jesus takes it in stride, but He also steps into a realm of teaching He apparently rarely went to, and He teaches at great length on the nature of their error. It was as if this error was so seriously wrong that an indirect “leading them to the truth,” sort of approach would not be sufficient for the situation. He addresses it in great detail and with the sternest of all warnings, yet He does so without the slightest manifestation of “reaction” or insecurity and insignificance.

Jesus does what Paul does in his epistles. He, without the emotion of rejection, lays out exactly what is wrong with their thinking and the end it will lead to.

1. How would I have dealt with this error?

I might have been very tempted to kill all of them right then and there. I would likely have turned to them, and said, “That’s it you guys...I take this kind of garbage from you every single day, and normally I gently lead you to the truth, but now you’ve gone over the top with this stuff. Let me tell you who you really are, what I really think of you, and expose what sick folks you really are.” He doesn’t do this. Amazingly He does nothing of this.

2. What does Jesus say to them?

He reveals the error of their logic, in a non-reactive way. He patiently leads them to realize the error of their thinking, and then, rather than harshly attack them, He lovingly warns them that if they continue to reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in revealing Him as being the Messiah, it would leave God with no alternative to judge them for all eternity as those worthy of Hell. He clearly didn’t want this for them, so He appeals to them to see the error of their thinking and teaching.

He proceeds into one of His most direct and important teachings on the nature of man’s heart, and how it is man’s heart that is the real problem, not his outward actions. God is far more concerned with a man’s heart than his ways. If God can get a hold of a man’s heart his ways will automatically change. The Pharisees know nothing of heart issues, and make everything external. As a result they completely missed who He was.

Jesus, over and over and over again reveals that man’s problem is a heart problem. We tend to challenge people at a performance or “sin” level, as if they can change their behavior just because the error of their behavior has been pointed out. Jesus knew this wasn’t the case, and He knew this was not God’s intent in giving the Law, and He also knew how the Pharisees were masters at communicating their error of interpretation to the nation of Israel.

As leaders, one of the most important things we can learn from Jesus' style of confronting error, is to know that He did so at a heart level, not a head level. He spoke more of God's mercy and grace than God's judgment and wrath. It's not that He didn't address judgment, because He did, but He did so more from a recognition of certain individuals who were hardened beyond reproof, than as a method to turn the hearts of those struggling with sin or error. We need to mirror this approach. We need to let God fill us with a compassionate wisdom, when facing those who are embracing error, whether that is personal error or the way they lead and develop the Church.

It's far too easy for us to pit mind against mind, and argue ourselves into relationship destroying corners, more because we just "need to be right," than because it is the best way to help someone out of error. We would be far better advised to employ a heart level gentle wisdom.

Mat 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "**Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.**"

Mat 12:39 But he answered them, "**An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.**"

1. How I might have answered this.

Since I imagine this question to have been a "perform for us because we are Pharisees, and the religious elite, and you should do what we want you to do," sort of request, I would probably have been incensed by such a request, and told them I don't perform for their private party. That's not who I am. Don't try to control me for your personal aims. You guys are such control freaks that you actually think you can manipulate me to do what you want me to do? You can forget that.

2. How Jesus answered it.

While His approach is far more direct, than in other cases, He hits them with a direct rebuke, and then enters a concept that appears to have completely surprised them and left them pondering what it was He was saying.

In this way, it avoided a one-for-one theological debate and argument, and caused them to go away trying to come up with an appropriate come back to his illustration of why He wouldn't perform for them. While they surely knew the Jonah story, it is highly unlikely they would have ever connected it with anything having to do with Jesus, and would have had very little idea how He intended to fulfill some aspect of this story.

In this way He uses another indirect approach to adjusting their errors of thinking, and avoids getting stuck in some argumentative controversy.

Our great challenge, as Leaders, is to manage our self esteem without always having to be "right," and prove that we are right about everything we believe and practice in some form of debate or argument. Somehow our fallenness interfaces with our need to be in control and right and causes us to press for agreement far more than Jesus did. Jesus could speak the truth, know it was right, and not demand agreement with Him, or press them in argument until they went away angry but agreeing He had won the debate. He didn't do this to people. He left them plenty of time to process the truth He spoke. This is such good leadership.

Mat 13:10 Then the disciples came and said to him, **"Why do you speak to them in parables?"**
Mat 13:11 And he answered them, **"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."**

1. How I might have answered their question.

As leaders we have to be so aware of our tendency to justify and explain the legitimacy of every decision we make, but Jesus did not wrestle with this. We are imperfect but Jesus is perfect. The difference between our approach must take serious consideration of this point. He couldn't answer wrong...we can. He couldn't have a wrong motive...we can.

The disciples knew the multitudes weren't understanding His message or the meaning of the parables, and it concerned them that if he was attempting to become the Messiah and King of Israel, to gain the support of the people for this move, He was going in the wrong direction by offending the religious leaders and confusing the multitudes. It didn't make sense to them that He kept shooting Himself in the foot by His approach.

I would have wanted them to understand that I was doing what I was doing because God's plan for me was far different than what they expected. I would have wanted to ease their concerns, and explain the plan I was operating. He didn't do this.

2. How Jesus answers their question.

He tells them He has no intention for the multitudes to understand Him. His disciples had to have been completely baffled, and He makes no attempt to calm their concerns in the way they expected. Instead, He teaches them something they had no way of processing at the time, but would later completely understand.

Can we as leaders say things that we know others won't understand? I think so, but I also know it is a very dangerous move, and must be one clearly led by the Spirit. To some degree this approach most especially belongs to Jesus' domain and not ours. He knew He needed to say things they wouldn't immediately understand, but would later see.

Mat 13:55 ***Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?***

Mat 13:56 ***And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"***

Mat 13:57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, **"A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."**

1. Here's how I might have answered their questions.

I get everything I say directly from God, and if you loved God like you say you do you'd understand I do, but you're always falsely judging Me and therefore you can't figure anything out about Me accurately.

2. Here's how Jesus answered them.

He indirectly let's them know He is a prophet and knows it, and their struggles with Him are more about "honor" than anything else. He doesn't go into a long explanation to justify how or why He says and does the things He does. His answer is short, thought provoking, and feels no compunction to resolve their confusion.

In this He is so different from us. We can hardly stand to be misunderstood. We so desperately want to be honored and agreed with, and when it doesn't happen it is so hard for us to refrain from negative emotions like anger or jealousy. Jesus doesn't do this. He knows Who He is. He's not insecure. The entire community rejected Him, and He doesn't fly into some "Hey...I'm God don't you know? What is wrong with you guys? I came here to work some really great miracles, and you're all hung up on knowing my lineage and can't hear a word I'm saying."

His security and authority was not in any way connected to their acceptance of Him. We MUST learn this. If we don't we will always be seeking to be heard, to be understood, to be agreed with. This kills leadership, and causes every discerning sheep to know that our leadership is more about us than about serving them and glorifying Jesus.

Mat 15:1 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,

Mat 15:2 **"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat."**

Mat 15:3 He answered them, **"And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"**

Mat 15:4 **For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'**

Mat 15:5 **But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God,**

Mat 15:6 **he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.**

Mat 15:7 **You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:**

Mat 15:8 **"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;**

Mat 15:9 **in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."**

1. How might I have answered them?

I'm God, and I can do whatever I want! All your traditions are wrong, and you need to burn them all up. Things like that. Wouldn't have impressed them much would it? Probably would have created a huge argument and rebukes. Jesus doesn't do this.

2. How does He answer them?

He does so with one of His favorite teaching devices... He answers their question with a question. He is basically answering the question they should have been asking. They should have been asking Him "Why are we so hung up on the traditions of the Elders and twisting the Scriptures to justify our religious bent?" He then goes on to explain to them that following the traditions of men over the truths in Christ is a heart issue. It always is a matter of the heart, when people choose a performance orientation to God, over a heart relationship.

We have seen Jesus return to this theme over and over again. He continually looks for ways to lead them away from an external "law orientation" to God, and into a heart relationship with Him, and He is willing to say this in the strongest of terms, both for their sakes and those listening to the Pharisees. To call them hypocrites is to tell them in the strongest terms he is willing to use, that the approach they have chosen to relate to God is as false as putting on a false face and saying it is their own. Choosing to ignore a heart relationship with God will lead to all kinds of aberrations of thinking and behavior.

He uses an illustration they had undoubtedly struggled with in their consciences, knowing they were excusing their selfishness, but since the Pharisees had sanctioned it they were ok with it. Jesus is telling them to start questioning their approach to life, and discover God is asking for their hearts to open to Him. For Jesus...everything is a heart issue. You will see this pattern emerge and develop continually in His teaching.

Mat 16:1 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him **they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.**

Mat 16:2 He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'

Mat 16:3 **And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.**

Mat 16:4 **An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah."** So he left them and departed.

1. How I might have answered this.

If you will remember, this is not the first time they've asked Him for this, and they didn't pay attention before, so I think I'd probably be very ready to remind them I wasn't going to do anything they wanted me to do.

I might have just said "NO!," or "How many times do I have to tell you the same thing?," or "This isn't what you need. What you need from Me is..." But Jesus said none of these things.

2. How did he answer them?

By giving them an illustration that would teach them very important truths, but which at the time they hear it they will have no way of understanding, and will need to go away and ponder it for a long time. He returns them to the Jonah story to direct their hearts to the place of insight.

His heart reaches out to them to, and through this approach, let's them know that unless they allow their hearts to open to God they are going to be swept away in judgment. If they seek God for the meaning of Jesus' story God would lead them to the truth that Jesus was presenting to them, and they would be spared the judgment to come. They would leave Him that day and talk over His message to them for days, BUT He avoided getting into a mind to mind argument over why He wouldn't give them what they wanted. If He had they would have known He was struggling with significance issues, and needed to prove Himself, and therefore couldn't have been Messiah. When He never fell into their trap it must have been very difficult for them to continue maintain He was not their Messiah. The same is true for you and me. When we fall into the trap of argumentation, proving ourselves, ministering out of insecurity or in fear of insignificance, and attempting to control others by out intellectualizing them, we show we are not truly walking in the love of God, or serving Christ. We are serving our own kingdom and worship ourselves.

Jesus' way is to speak what people need to hear, not what their questions imply or minds demand.

Mat 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Mat 16:22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "**Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.**"

Mat 16:23 But he turned and said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**"

1. How would I have answered Peter's questioning rebuke?

I would probably have gently taken him aside, and said, "Look Pete, I know this is hard for you. You love Me and want what you think is best for me and the nation of Israel, but I have to let this happen. Right now you won't understand it all, and it will seem so wrong, but it is really the best. Don't try to comprehend it all right now."

I wouldn't have wanted to embarrass him in front of the other disciples, or make him feel like he had really messed up, but Jesus saw something inside Peter that just had to be addressed.

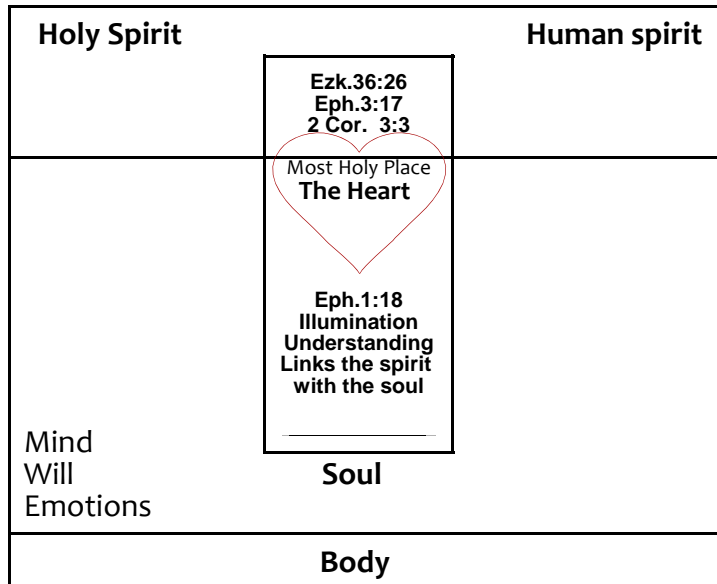
2. How did Jesus address his rebuking question?

He went right to the heart of what Peter's problem really was...self centered religion. This was always Peter's problem, as it is with most of us. Jesus obviously knew this was the best time to really bear down on Peter and address the issue of his heart. In essence He is saying "Peter, you listen to your flesh for far too many decisions and answers to life. You must distrust your own idea of things and learn to lean on the Spirit to interpret life for you. If you are going to be My disciple you must learn to mount up with the Spirit and let Him reveal God's purposes. And, your demanding your way, demanding that your idea of things should rule, and demand that God make you comfortable, must come to an end. This is going to kill something in you, to watch me die, but it will happen, and when it does it will have prepared you to die for Me.

Jesus isn't afraid to say the hard things we need to hear. Once again, this is a heart issue. Peter's heart is right, but his heart must learn to tip upwards, rather than down into his soul.

Jesus is laboring here to teach Peter the place he needs to relate from. He's used to a soulish orientation to life, and Jesus knows that until he learns to access the spirit dimension of his being he is going to see life from a purely human rather than divine perspective.

The following diagram illustrates this.



Jesus always knows what we most need to hear. He rarely speaks to us what we want to hear.

Mat 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, **"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"**

Mat 18:2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them

Mat 18:3 and said, **"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Mat 18:4 **Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

Mat 18:5 **"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,**

1. What answer would I have given to the disciples?

Probably something like "Those who pray many hours a day, lead many souls to Christ, study the truths of scripture at great length, and overcomes the desires of the flesh."

2. What did Jesus say?

What nobody would ever have suspected...

Only God could have shown this to Jesus. To conclude that the ones from their society that were the least noticed or recognized were the true elite would have floored them. Similarly, when Jesus taught His disciples that the rich would find it especially difficult to enter the Kingdom, they couldn't imagine such a thing. Upside down priorities...

Only as we allow our hearts to be touched by heaven will we see life from His perspective. When we do our leadership will look more like His and less like ours.

Mat 18:21 Then Peter came up and said to him, **"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"**

Mat 18:22 Jesus said to him, **"I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.**

1. How would I have answered him?

Only forgive him a few times for the same thing, because if he is really serious he will stop his behavior after a few manifestations of your grace, but if he doesn't then it proves he isn't serious, and you can just shut him down, walk away from him, and give up.

2. How did Jesus answer?

Again, not at all an answer that could have been predicted, and because His heart is so large He had a ready story to illustrate just how forgiving God really is, and at the same time, how seriously God takes the rejection of His mercy.

Jesus is continually directing the hearts of mankind to the heart of God. God desires mercy, not sacrifice, not judgment. He only judges ultimate judgment when His mercy has been completely scorned, not when His law is violated. The greatest offense of all is the rejection of His heart of mercy.

Mat 19:3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, **"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"**

Mat 19:4 He answered, **"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,**

Mat 19:5 **and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'?**

Mat 19:6 **So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."**

Mat 19:8 He said to them, **"Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."**

1. How would you have answered this question?

We tend to answer most of the questions surrounding divorce with answers akin to the Law, rather than Grace.

2. How did Jesus answer?

He answered with a question...the question they should have been asking their own hearts, "Why do we divorce our wives so easily?" You do because your hearts are hard. Always coming back to heart issues. You abuse your wives, dishonor your wives, hurt their feelings, fail to love them as they deserve, to cherish them as the treasures they are, because you let disappointments turn your hearts cold, and you get mad at God for giving you a wife that you no longer like, and then from that place you harden your hearts and hurt them, ultimately divorcing them.

Jesus always took marriage problems to be about heart issues, and wanted each party to look deeply at the way they manifested love to their spouse. If spouses love one another, and treat them in love, then divorce would never be a factor. It is only when we divorce ourselves from the love of God that we do things that cause our spouses to want to divorce us.

As leaders we need to avoid arguing with couples who fight with one another, and focus their hearts on love. If they both love God then they will learn to love one another, and the things that now disappoint them will melt away in His sacrificial love.

Mat 19:16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "**Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?**"

Mat 19:17 And he said to him, "**Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.**"

1. How would you have answered him?

A long detailed explanation of the components of salvation?

2. How does Jesus answer him?

With a question again...one designed to make him think, not get into a long winded debate, not give him a quick and easy answer, not succumb to the temptation to answer from some self impressed place of theological insight (like this man hoped to lead him into).

He indirectly taught him that he wasn't good enough to be saved. He wanted him to know that if being good was what it took to be saved he didn't have a chance. He's telling him what he needs to hear, not what he wants to hear. He's creating a question in his mind that his mind can't possibly answer from his frame of reference.

Later, when it was obvious he wasn't going to understand what Jesus was telling him, He told him something that would blow all his circuits..."Go sell everything and do the ultimate good...give all you have to the poor and come follow Me." This was designed to stretch his awareness of how self centered he was, and show him he was completely unprepared to be saved. We can't be saved as long as we are worshiping ourselves or our things.

Mat 19:25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "**Who then can be saved?**"

Mat 19:26 But Jesus looked at them and said, "**With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**"

1. How would you have answered their incredulity?

Perhaps with another theological explanation of what composes a true salvation decision?

2. Notice how Jesus answers them.

A very short, very cryptic answer. I'm sure the disciples went away saying to one another "Did you understand His answer to my question?" And each of them would have replied "I don't think I did."

Jesus makes no attempt to solve their puzzlement. Why? Why doesn't He just neatly and cleanly spell it all out for them? Perhaps because good leaders know something that the rest of us struggle with. To give all the answers to seeking hearts is to rob them of the ardent search for truth. Often we make it too easy for those we are training. We want to be liked too much. We want to be appreciated for the clear answers we give to every question they have. After all, all you have to do is fail to give a completely clear answer to one of your students and they will let you know how you have failed to be a good teacher, and how so-and-so teacher teaches sooo much more clearly than you do. Much of our teaching approach stems from an insecure desire to be liked, or to be paid. We must overcome this and give them what they need to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear.

Mat 21:19 And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "**May no fruit ever come from you again!**" And the fig tree withered at once.

Mat 21:20 When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "**How did the fig tree wither at once?**"

Mat 21:21 And Jesus answered them, "**Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen.**"

Mat 21:22 **And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."**

1. How would you have answered their question?

Probably just "It is a miracle of God..."

2. How did Jesus answer it?

I don't know about you, but I still don't really understand His answer. As often as I've read it I'm still puzzled by it. I suppose there must be some internal barrier in my heart to hearing this as Jesus meant it, but it puzzles me to no end still.

I don't think they understood Him either, and I'm sure He knew they didn't, and I'm sure He knows most of us still don't. So, why does He do this? Why does He answer questions with questions or with answers no one understands? My guess is to cause us to dig deeply into His heart...for out of the abundance of the treasures of His heart there is great wisdom. We must keep searching.

I may not like the way He does this, and I may prefer teachers who make everything clear and understandable, but I have to admit that Jesus' approach to learning is to give very little information, never get into debates or arguments, and leave His hearers struggling to comprehend what He says. This is His way, and good leaders learn from this approach.

When students become angry with you for confusing them, or refusing to entertain all their questions, remind them of the approach Jesus took to teaching. Have them read over this article. Ask them do a study like this in the Gospels. It will be a true eye opener for them.

Mat 21:23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "**By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?**"

Mat 21:24 Jesus answered them, "**I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.**"

Mat 21:25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"

Mat 21:26 But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

Mat 21:27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "**Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.**"

1. How would you have answered this?

Defensively? Argumentatively? With arrogance and posturing?

Would you have given them a full theological explanation of your origins in God, that you are the incarnate son of God, that you are perfect and can make no errors, etc.?

I can just hear the arguments we could have gotten in over these things. We'd have ended up in prison, but Jesus just walked away from each of the controversies.

2. How did Jesus answer them?

Another question for their question. They were asking the wrong question again, so He answered the question they should have been asking. Have you ever done this as a leader? You should! Many times giving people the answers to the questions they think they need, is to create more of a problem for them because they aren't ready for the answer.

Their hearts were rejecting the message of God through John, and they were rejecting His, so why answer their question when what they needed to do was deal with their hearts, not ask him extraneous questions. He flat out refused to answer them. He knew they had no capacity for the answer to their question. When we give people what they aren't ready to receive we leave them without what they do need, and we set them up for an arrogant and demanding approach to learning. We imply we can be manipulated into meeting their demands for clarity. We let them take the lead by their demands and we give up the place of leadership to those who are less capable of handling true leadership. We succumb to a mental/soul satisfying answer in the place where their spirit needs to be fed and challenged.

Notice too...Jesus felt no responsibility to answer their question, if they weren't willing to address the issue He posed to them. Jesus NEVER concerned Himself with His popularity with anyone. He said what needed to be said, knew He said it right, and left it with them to work through. It is so obvious He had no insecurity issues. We can learn much from this.

Mat 22:17 **Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"**

Mat 22:18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, **"Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"**

Mat 22:19 **Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.**

Mat 22:20 **And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"**

Mat 22:21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, **"Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."**

1. How would you have responded?

I might have gone into great analytical detail of how the government of God was supreme to the government of men. Or, I might have detected their hypocrisy, as did Jesus, and take them on in a defensive or arrogant way, as one receiving a personally offensive attack. Not Jesus!

2. Notice His answer.

He, willing to offend them, but yet not sacrificing truth or love, nor speaking from spite, said exactly what they needed to hear. He made no friends that day...

Notice the wisdom of His words. Can we speak with such wisdom? I'm not sure, but one thing I'm sure of, if we don't deal with our attitudes, our insecurity, and our need for significance, at a very deep level, we don't stand a chance of ever speaking as He did.

Well, these are sufficient passages from Matthew to adequately surface His approach to those who questioned Him according to the thinkings of their souls.

Over and over again we see the same approach:

- 1 No manifestation of insecurity.
- 2 No manifestation of reactions based on stressed insignificance.
- 3 No reactions based on personal fear resulting in uncontrolled anger.
- 4 Always referencing heart issues over legalistic performance issues.
- 5 Saying what they needed to hear, not necessarily what they wanted to hear.
- 6 No concern for personal popularity.
- 7 No arrogance manifested, which would have been evidenced by a defensive and argumentative posture.
- 8 He never pressed for agreement with His truths. He spoke it calmly and left it with the Spirit.
- 9 He never sacrificed either love or truth to make His points.
- 10 He spoke what they needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear.
- 11 He skillfully side stepped their attempts to pull Him into a soulish argument.
- 12 He answered the questions they should have been asking, not the ones they were asking.

Can we learn to speak from this kind of leadership approach? Yes, and No! We will never be Jesus, and thus the likelihood of our being as poised, loving, wise, and full of the Spirit, is not likely, but we can certainly move in His direction and learn from His example.

Time after time Jesus relates men to heart issues, and for leaders this emphasis needs to speak loud and clear. It is all too easy to be goal oriented, “do” oriented, and Jesus is clearly “be” oriented.

Our call is not to fix people, but point their hearts to Jesus. Only God can fix anyone. The moment we step into His domain we begin to destroy relationships and head people in the wrong direction. We make disciples that are two fold more servants of the devil than we are.

As we walk carefully before the Lord we will learn to move slowly, be more patient, and full of grace and mercy. These things marked Jesus and they need to mark our leadership as well.

God is in no hurry to change people. Our value as leaders cannot be measured in achieving our will in and through their lives. The measure of our leadership is the consistency with which we point them to Jesus, manifest His love, and let Him change their lives.

God bless you as you meditate on His leading ways!