

HG Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 6:43-49

Jesus concludes His “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew (see Matt. 7:15-27) and His “Sermon on the Plain” here in Luke very similarly...using the same imagery and making the same point.

The key word in 6:43-45 that we want to focus on is “heart”. The “heart” is one of the most important metonyms in Scripture...carrying with it the idea of both thoughts and feelings, as well as understanding, will, intention, affection, desire, memory, conscience. It’s one word that tries to capture all that makes up the inner self. (This is true both of the OT/Hebrew word “leb” and the NT/Greek word “kardia” ...from where we get the word “cardio”) Let’s briefly take a look at some uses of “heart” in Scripture.

*“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his **heart** was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5 NIV)*

*“I will praise you, O Lord, with all my **heart**; I will tell of all your wonders.” (Psalm 9:1 NIV)*

*“But I trust in your unfailing love; my **heart** rejoices in your salvation.” (Psalm 13:5 NIV)*

*“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your **heart**.” (Proverbs 3:3 NIV)*

*“Trust in the Lord with all your **heart** and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5 NIV)*

*“Above all else, guard your **heart**, for it is the wellspring of life.” (Proverbs 4:23 NIV)*

*“Many are the plans in a man’s **heart**, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” (Proverbs 19:21 NIV)*

*“The **heart** is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the **heart** and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” (Jeremiah 17:9-10 NIV)*

*“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their **hearts**. I will be their God and they will be my people.’” (Jeremiah 31:33 NIV)*

*“Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37)*

*“For from within, out of men’s **hearts**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’.” (Mark 7:21-23 NIV)*

*“Do not let your **hearts** be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” (John 14:1 NIV)*

*“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your **heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your **heart** that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)*

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your **hearts**, since as members of one body you are called to peace. And be thankful.” (Colossians 3:15)*

*“But in your **hearts** set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15)*

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. The “heart” is one of the most important concepts in Scripture to understand...as testified by its frequency of use (about 600 times in the OT and 160 times in the NT...but who’s counting☺)?

So Jesus’ invitation/challenge as He wrapped up His sermon was for His listeners (and us) to examine the condition of our hearts. But how do we do that? If we were to go to the doctor, we could get our heart (actual blood-pumping organ) checked. The doctor could check our heart rate, blood pressure, perform more sophisticated exams like an EKG, etc. And we might know that we need to visit a doctor based on how we feel, or by some concerning symptoms. But how do we check the condition of our “spiritual” (for lack of a better term) heart?

First we can look at “symptoms”: what is coming out of us from the inside (attitudes, words/speech, behaviors). What is “stored up” in our hearts...good things or evil things? Whatever is on the inside will end up on the outside. So the invitation/challenge is to do the tough work of good, honest, self-reflection/introspection. Well, that sounds simple enough, but there are 2 complicating factors. One is that we are all really good at rationalizing/justifying our own attitude, behavior, and speech. We are good at calling evil, good (or at least not so bad)...particularly when it’s associated to ourselves. We’re masters of self-deception in that way. This ties into the second complicating factor which is we’re all pretty good actors (remember what Jesus said about hypocrites/actors in the previous passage last week?). I don’t think we consciously do it...we’ve just learned to act in ways that hide the true nature of what’s inside.

So another thing we can do is to ask others to tell us what they see in/from us? Do each of us have people in our lives who can tell it to us straight? Who will let us know if what they see in us (again, attitudes, behaviors, words) are less than what Christ would want for us? Just as we go to a doctor for analysis and don’t simply settle for self-diagnosis, it is good for us to get help from others spiritually as well.

- Q. Would you consider yourself a reflective/introspective person? How so?**
- Q. Do you have someone in your life (someone who has a good vantage point) who can and speak honestly to you...even confrontationally if necessary? How good are you at receiving such input/feedback?**

Since Jesus specifically mentions, *“For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”*, it would be good to analyze our speech (by “speech” I mean all that goes with spoken communication: words, tone, intent, etc.)

Here’s an interesting exercise, perhaps, to help with that. We might be familiar with a money log or a calorie log (i.e. charting our spending so we know where money goes, or counting calories in order to get a more accurate measure of our calorie intake.) What if we were to pay attention to every spoken word over the course of a week? Something I’ve experienced when it comes to logging money or calories is that it slows me down (mainly because I know I’ll have to make the extra effort to write it down). I suspect if we did a similar exercise with our speech the slowing down process might be beneficial. It might cause us pause to ask, “Do I really want/need to say this? What do these words I want to say right now say about my heart?” Granted, it would be a little cumbersome, but it might be beneficial.

The Bible has much to say about our words/speech...

“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” (Proverbs 10:19 NIV)

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” (Proverbs 12:18 NIV)

“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.” (Proverbs 13:3 NIV)

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1 NIV)

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” (Proverbs 18:21 NIV)

“A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.” (Proverbs 20:19 NIV)

“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36-37 NIV)

“We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them

obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water." (James 3:2-12 NIV)

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29 NIV)

As a side note, everything the Bible has to say about our use of words, or our tongue/speech, is also true of written words (think Facebook or other social media).

- Q. From the past week, describe something you regret saying. (What did you say, why did you say it, and why do you regret it?) Now let's take it a step deeper: what does this say about the condition of your heart? (If nothing comes to mind from the past week, then anything recent will suffice...though the running assumption is we probably all have something even from just the past week.)**
- Q. Though Jesus didn't specifically get into it, it is worth asking, HOW does stuff get "stored up" in our hearts in the first place? What is stored up in your heart that you wish wasn't?**
- Q. As you consider the "fruit" of your life, what do you see that encourages you and what do you see that concerns you?**

Jesus concluded His message with a contrast between the wise and foolish builder...the wise being likened to those who hear Jesus and obey (or put into practice); the foolish being those who hear and don't heed. He prefaced His illustration with a rhetorical question: *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*

Jesus desires us to not only think the right/accurate things about Him, about who He is and what He's done. He wants us to DO WHAT HE SAYS. In the book of James (Jesus' half-brother) we read, *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."* (James 1:22 NIV) (Incidentally, if you read the book of James it becomes pretty obvious how heavily influenced James was by the Sermon on the Mount/Plain.)

Q. In what ways are you a “hearer only” and not a “doer” when it comes to the teachings of Jesus? How can we as a HG help each other to be “doers of the word”?